THE BALLET DANCER

MATILDE SERAO

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THE BALLET DANCER AND ON GUARD

By

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I

CARMELA MININO stood beside her chest of drawers and counted over and over again the money that she kept in a small worn purse, and she found always the same sum, the same eighteen francs—three bills of five and three of one franc—which she had found the day before and also the previous week. She pulled out of her pocket the tiny old *portemonnaie* she always carried about with her, and in which she kept a little change—a few pence—with which to pay omnibus fares, a chair at Mass, and now and then a glass of mineral water. In this receptacle she found sevenpence, and, with a gesture at once puerile and sad, she turned and looked anxiously and despairingly round her room, as if from the bare walls and the poor furniture, which consisted of only a few absolutely indispensable objects, she could, like a fairy, evoke an imaginary sum of money with which to swell her insufficient capital. She had had a dream of being able to carry this year a wreath of fresh flowers to the tomb of her god-mother and benefactress—a large wreath, all made of the most beautiful flowers, with an inscription also in flowers—an inscription composed of two or

three words of remembrance, gratitude and affection. For this purpose she had laid up some money in the summer, putting by a penny at a time, and, by depriving herself of many things, had managed to scrape together forty-two francs, while, in her mind's eye, the wreath assumed ever fairer proportions and more vivid colours, and the thought of laying it with her own hands on the tomb where Amina Boschetti slept was sweet to her.

In order to facilitate this darling project, Carmela Minino had signed an engagement to dance at Castellamare, in August and September, in the dreary barn called Stabia Hall, with its ceiling open to the sky, and under the direction of Civillo Patalano, an impresario who paid little, and that little irregularly, and who often paid nothing at all. Carmela had accepted the engagement, in spite of her doubts of Patalano, because she did not wish to trench upon the sum set apart for the wreath, and also because she wished to increase it, if it were possible; and she had danced in the wooden theatre, in the open air, perspiring in the hot August evenings until her silk tights were glued to her skin, and she caught one cold after another in the draughts which swept over the stage. In vain did she wrap herself in her black woollen shawl when she left it. And all this pain and trouble for nothing!

September had been cold and rainy, and all the summer visitors had left Castellamare; Stabia Hall

was deserted, and, notwithstanding the real curses and feigned tears of the ballet-dancers, Civillo Patalano had not paid them for the month of September. Only here and there a girl who was lucky enough to have an energetic father, and one capable of swearing louder than Civillo Patalano, or a brother whom she supported, and whose interest was therefore involved in her being paid, or a girl who had a lover who showed his fist to the impresario—only persons so protected succeeded in wrenching a few francs from him.

Carmela Minino had screamed and wept, but all to no purpose. She was alone, she had no defenders, and Patalano did not pay her the forty-five francs owing to her for the month of September, although he had signed her contract at a franc and a half an evening. It was a financial disaster for the poor girl; she had to pay half the rent of the miserable room where she slept with Maria Civita, another dancer, and an equally unfortunate one, except that she had a lover in Naples who sent her a postal-order for twenty francs. Then, Carmela had to pay her board until the end of the month at a small restaurant, and, finally, she had to return to Naples, paying her third-class ticket herself, and carrying with her the unpleasant consciousness that her best silk tights were so stained by perspiration as to be unwearable, and her two best pairs of satin slippers utterly worn out by dancing on the rough

floor of Stabia Hall. Between this catastrophe and a dull month of October, when she could get no engagement, a large part of the savings which she had set apart for the wreath of fresh flowers gradually melted away, and Carmela Minino felt her heart sink every time she took a franc out of her purse. And thus it happened that on the morning of the first of November she only had eighteen francs and thirty-five centimes with which to honour her godmother's tomb, and from this sum she was forced to deduct a few pence for her supper, and for the journey to and from Paggioreale on a day when all Naples goes there, and cabs are enormously expensive.

'Flowers are so dear at this season!' she thought within herself as she put on her hat to go out; and a secret bitterness swelled within her as she felt her beautiful dream to be almost completely destroyed. Out of doors the weather was cloudy, and when Carmela had descended the four flights of steps which led from her room in the Vicolo Paradiso to the Pignasecca, she decided to go back again and take her umbrella. She was dressed in black, although her mourning for her mother had been long laid aside; she had wanted to go in a black gown to pray for her benefactress, but in any case she could not have afforded a new winter gown. The weather was so uncertain. If it rained, the black feather in her hat would be spoiled. It was an ancient plume which had once been splendid, and

which Carmela wore all the year round, on summer and winter hats, which were trimmed afresh according to the season, while the feather was carefully curled by her with the back of the scissors. Notwithstanding all her care, the long feather was a little worn—she had had it for five or six years! Rain spoils feathers.

Full of uneasy presentiments, she went upstairs, and felt more tranquil when she returned, carrying pressed to her bosom the faithful old umbrella which had for years protected her from summer and winter rains, as she went to, and returned from, San Carlo. With the light step of her profession, she passed on, picking her way carefully, and saying a 'Hail Mary' as she passed the Madonna of the Pignasecca. Absorbed in her sad thoughts, Carmela Minino reached the street called Chiaia, where the best florists in Naples are to be found.

The walls of Toledo and Chiaia were covered with the advertisements peculiar to All Saints' Day. At one place wax candles were advertised at three francs a pound; at another wire wreaths, cheap and lasting; another advertisement bore the time-table of the small branch railroad Nola Baiano, which had a station at Paggioreale; there were, further on, numberless advertisements of tapers, wreaths, etc.; and even that of a restaurant which provided a hot dinner, with the white wine called asprinia, at a place not far from the cemetery and

on the direct route to it, so that people could refresh themselves comfortably after having done their duty to the dead. All the small dry-goods shops displayed wreaths of wire, of stiff tarlatan, of dried immortelles, painted in various colours, and of pressed flowers, and all were crowded with purchasers, who were continually going in and coming out with small or large wreaths, while quantities of private carriages swept by, full of people dressed in mourning and carrying wreaths of flowers. Some of these wreaths were immense, superb, and Carmela's eyes filled with tears as she thought of the miserable sum which she held tightly in her hand—such a poor little sum compared with her ardent desire to heap flowers on the tomb of the beloved being who had been everything to her in life and in death.

The tears did her good, however, by producing a reaction. Instead of hopeless depression, a sense of exaltation, a firm resolution to conquer destiny for at least that one day, took possession of her soul. And in this spirit she unhesitatingly pushed open the great glass doors which led to Lamarra's shop, which was the finest in Naples, and, stepping lightly over the damp marble floor, and past the crowds of people who were buying, paying, ordering, arriving, and departing, she reached the counter where the employés were making wreaths of tea-roses and ferns, and crosses of double chrysanthemums, reposing on a background of dark-green leaves, and, without

the slightest timidity, asked a tall, white-haired man, who was directing the others :

'Please show me some wreaths of fresh flowers.'

'All these you see here are already ordered,' replied the man with white moustaches, who was no other than Lamarra, hardly deigning to look at Carmela Minino while he spoke.

She was taken aback, and, flushing and paling alternately, turned to look at the wreaths of chrysanthemums and the cushions of roses, upon which reposed crosses of small white flowers, which were growing rapidly under the expert fingers of the assistants. There was something inexpressibly sad in all this floral abundance.

'About how much would a wreath cost?' murmured Carmela, swallowing her tears.

'I can make you one for a hundred or two hundred francs, as you like,' answered Lamarra, while he handed change to a customer and wrote an order in his book.

'But less—are there none for less than a hundred francs?' asked Carmela, turning as red as fire.

'Something for sixty or fifty francs,' answered the florist abstractedly, absorbed in his affairs, and perceiving that he had to do with a client of no consequence.

Carmela was silent for a moment. How beautiful they were, those wreaths of fresh flowers, the delicate flowers which bloom in November, as if to adorn the

tombs of the departed on the day of commemoration! How fragrant with a soft, melancholy fragrance! Lovely flowers! destined to exhale their sweetness on the marble slabs of the *composanto*, and to spend their brief existence in covering for two days the hard, cold stones which had lain bare and abandoned for a year! She took courage and said:

'What is the very lowest price for a handsome wreath? Please tell me.'

Lamarra looked her full in the face this time with a contemptuous expression; he found that this girl was decidedly making him lose too much time, and he answered curtly:

'Thirty francs.'

'Ah!' she answered submissively.

Slowly Carmela turned and left the shop, a prey to the most profound depression. Why had she gone into the shop when she only possessed eighteen francs? Why had she wanted to see all those flowers when she could not take them to Amina Boschetti? Why had she been so foolish?—she, so poor, so humble, so alone, with no earthly resource but her dancing—dancing for which she was often unable to obtain an engagement, although she had no other means of earning her bread. And how poorly it was paid!—two francs and a half or three francs at San Carlo, and less in the smaller theatres.

She walked slowly toward the lower part of the Strada di Chiaia, reproving herself severely the while

for her pride, her arrogance, her great presumption. Who was she, pray? A poor ballet-dancer, plain, ungraceful, without any redeeming quality but her youth and her tireless energy. And she had dared to think of taking a wreath of fresh flowers to the tomb of Amina Boschetti! To Amina Boschetti? And during her brief day had not the Boschetti been the fairest, loftiest, most brilliant star of San Carlo, unequalled and never to be equalled in excellence? Had she not been a very dream of grace and every feminine charm, an airy phantom of delight in her floating tulle robes, and the cunningly woven bodices of silver and gold which had made her look like a butterfly as she flitted about the stage?

As she walked slowly onward, Carmela recalled the ideal, poetic beauty of the great Boschetti in Neapolitan costume, when she danced in the 'Muta di Portici'; she saw her lying on the ground, with her arms forming an arch above her beautiful dark head; she remembered her smile—that ineffable, mysterious smile, which gave a divine beauty to her lovely face. Never to be forgotten, the evening when she saw her first! Carmela, though only ten years old, had felt her heart swell with adoration for the lovely creature who had seemed to her something unearthly; she had longed to kiss her tiny, flying feet. And now, as recollections of the past crowded upon her—as she thought of the creature who had been so marvellously, so strangely beautiful, whose existence had

been one of boundless luxury and limitless pleasure, who had possessed palaces and villas of princely splendour, and lovers by the score, and who yet had been torn away from life in the fulness of her youth and beauty—as she thought of all this, Carmela felt an intenser, more burning desire to heap flowers—masses of flowers—on her tomb; the horror of her poverty, of her helplessness, seized her. And she turned round instantly, and went courageously back to Lamarra.

'Listen! listen!' she said hastily, as, panting and pale with emotion, she touched Lamarra's arm. 'You ought to make me a wreath of fresh flowers for fifteen francs.'

Lamarra, struck by the intense feeling she displayed, said in a friendly tone:

'My child, it is not possible.'

'Try—please try to make it for me,' she stammered, more and more agitated, and repressing her sobs with difficulty.

'Flowers are very dear,' observed Lamarra, already relaxing a little the implacable dignity of the first florist in Naples.

'Never mind; you can make it smaller—for fifteen francs—fifteen francs——'

'But must I contribute to it myself, perhaps?' cried Lamarra, with pretended anger, but moved, in spite of himself, by the poor girl's pallor and trembling voice.

'Yes, please; be charitable. It is a great charity. I have—only fifteen francs,' she added in the lowest voice, dizzy with mortification, feeling as if she were really a beggar.

'Well—very well,' said the florist suddenly.

They were silent. Carmela leant against the wall with downcast eyes, and as she took the fifteen francs out of her poor little purse the keen eyes of the florist noted that only three francs were left in it.

'Where shall I send it?' he asked.

'I will take it. I shall carry it myself.'

'It is not made yet.'

'I will wait.'

He went into the other room, gave an order, and returned.

'You have ordered it? How have you ordered it?' she asked anxiously.

'Of white chrysanthemums.'

'Ah, that is right. *Please* put a few roses.'

'Monthly roses—yes, we can put a few.'

'Yes, yes; some roses, I beg of you.'

The florist went again into the room at the back of the shop, and Carmela waited patiently, standing on the damp, flower-strewn floor, and jostled continually by arriving and departing customers. The air was full of the faint perfume of autumn flowers.

When he returned Lamarra passed close to Carmela in order to take out of the window a huge bunch of white roses—magnificent hothouse roses—and he

began to fasten them to a palm-branch, arranging them with great taste and skill.

'This wreath is for your mother?' he asked curiously, but with benignity.

'No,' said Carmela; 'it is for my godmother.'

'Oh! You were very fond of her, then?'

'Yes, very; and I love her now as much as ever.'

'And she was old when she went to Paradise?'

'No; she was young and beautiful. She looked like an angel,' she added with half-closed eyes, as if to recall some radiant vision.

'What are we poor mortals?' said the florist philosophically. 'Did she die lately?'

'No, six years ago. I was eighteen——' and her eyes filled with tears.

'Don't think of it,' said the florist soothingly, as he finished arranging the roses; and taking up a superb ribbon of white moiré-antique, knotted it round the bouquet, leaving long floating ends, on which was inscribed in gold letters: 'Dearest Maria, wait for me.—CARLO.'

Carmela, who watched everything with the closest attention, exclaimed:

'Couldn't you put a ribbon or an inscription on my wreath?'

'Yes; now we must write a letter on the wreath all in flowers!' exclaimed Lamarra ironically.

'At least, her name—only her name,' persisted Carmela, clasping her hands.

'What was her name?'

'She was called Amina Boschetti,' answered Carmela, in a low voice.

'The name of our great dancer, Boschetti?'

'It was she—she was my godmother,' said poor Carmela, while two large tears rolled down her cheeks.

Lamarra looked at her with surprise. She was so miserably clad; she held in her hands such an old, old umbrella; her poor black gloves were so white at the seams that the florist, as he recalled the brilliant goddess of the dance, upon whose every graceful movement thousands had gazed in almost delirious ecstasy, found it difficult to believe that the person before him could have had any connection with so dazzling a creature.

'She was my benefactress, in life and death,' said Carmela, with an impetuous burst of gratitude, 'and I ought to remember her always.'

'She was a grand lady, good, and beautiful, and generous,' answered the florist.

'You knew her, then?'

'Yes. The flowers I have taken to the theatre for her on certain evenings! I made a good deal of money out of the men who went mad about her. But she used to laugh at them all, I remember. What evenings those were! She seemed a fairy when she danced.'

'And now she is dead,' answered the girl, with a

breaking voice. 'Since you knew her, I pray you to write her name on the wreath, with the roses.'

The mid-day cannon was booming when Carmela, joyously carrying her wreath, entered the railway-station. After having thought over ways and means with the profound consideration peculiar to people of infinitely small means, who are obliged to count every penny, she had decided that it would be better for her to take the train. There are hundreds of omnibuses which go to Paggioreale on All Saints' Day, but they are crammed with people and go very slowly. Carmela did not know whether she would have been allowed to enter an omnibus with her large wreath, which would have greatly incommoded the other passengers. Again, on All Saints' Day there are thousands of small and large cabs which go to the cemetery, but the least they ask is five francs. The wreath was so large and heavy that she could not walk, as she would have done had she not been so heavily burdened. Lamarra, as a homage to the memory of the divinity of San Carlo, had made the wreath so beautiful! Within the border of white chrysanthemums there was another of small pale pink ones, and the words 'To Amina Boschetti' were woven in pink rosebuds—modest, monthly rosebuds, but fresh and dewy. Carmela did not feel the weight of the wreath; she walked on quietly, happy in her sacrifice, and deeply touched by the kindness

of the florist who had deigned to accept her poor fifteen francs; she reflected that her godmother's name had been the talisman which had touched the heart of Lamarra. Oh, not for her own sake! Plain, and ungraceful, and timid, notwithstanding her profession, perhaps even because of it, since it caused her to feel her defects the more keenly, she was distrustful of anything like flattery, and crushed by the consciousness of her poor clothes and hopeless poverty.

Carmela passed through the world alone, expecting nothing, and so void of hope that a kind word or act would move her to tears; the miracle of having obtained these flowers—which she thought magnificent—seemed to her immense, and it was all because the beloved name of the great artist had been pronounced in the florist's shop. Absorbed in these thoughts, she walked on quickly, looking to neither right nor left, but as she passed Gambrinus's, the most fashionable café in Naples, she happened to raise her eyes and saw, standing before the door, Count Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande. He stood with his usual air of haughty indifference, his magnificent blue eyes, as cold and hard as steel, fixed on the gray November sky, his hands plunged deep in the pockets of his English coat, a Havana cigar between his lips. Whether he waited for someone or was waited for did not transpire from his manner or the expression of his countenance, which was as cold

and immovable as marble. The exquisitely pure lines of his face, the absolutely correct oval, the perfect aquiline nose, the finely and firmly chiselled chin, the broad brow, the large, well-opened blue eyes, the classically beautiful mouth, with the full-red lips and regular white teeth, the blond curling hair and moustache—all formed an ensemble of incomparable beauty. But if the lines of his face were beautiful they were hard and cruel as well; the profile was stern, the glance of the blue eyes cold and indifferent, and sometimes full of contemptuous irony; the brow betrayed the presence of a constant preoccupation, veiled by the glacial pride, the cruel disdain, which was the dominant expression of the face.

Carmela Minino knew the Count di Torregrande by sight. He was an annual subscriber to a place in the front row of armchairs at San Carlo, and never failed to come to the theatre, late every evening, arrayed in irreproachable evening-dress, with a gardenia in his button-hole, and a certain military rigidity of demeanour which enhanced his native elegance and distinction, and was a souvenir of the time when he had been an officer in a cavalry regiment. His face, therefore, was familiar to all the ballet-girls, but was particularly so because he was the protector of the beautiful Emilia Tromba, the leader of the first row of dancers, who, though she danced carelessly and never paid her fines (which

were numerous), always was sure of an engagement because of her splendid beauty, and always had money, jewels, and carriages in abundance. She was a great favourite with the regular habitués at San Carlo, notwithstanding her loud vulgarity, harsh voice, and quarrelsome disposition.

Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande sometimes, but rarely, waited for Emilia at the wings. On such occasions he never deigned to speak to any of the dancers, but stood in haughty silence, glancing at them with the proud eyes which at once fascinated and repelled, shrugging his shoulders slightly when he heard Emilia disputing in her parrot-like tones with the dresser, the scene-shifter, or the fireman, as the case might be, but never departing himself from the impassibility of the grand seigneur—remaining the grand seigneur in spite of his connection with the more than vulgar Emilia. Nearly every evening his coupé waited for her at the door of the theatre, but it was almost always empty.

As she thought of these things, Carmela found herself staring hard at the young nobleman; but he, naturally, did not see her, and turned and re-entered the café. Involuntarily Carmela heaved a profound sigh, and suddenly the way seemed long, and the weight of the wreath of flowers she carried almost intolerably heavy. But she conquered this moment of discouragement; it was growing late, the sky threatened rain, and if it should rain, she could not

have opened her umbrella, as her hands were occupied by her wreath.

When she entered the little station she found an enormous crowd, and instantly perceived that she would not find even standing-room in a third-class carriage. She felt so oppressed, so weak and poor, so wounded somewhere in the innermost depths of her soul, that she forgot her usual anxious provident economy, and bought a second-class ticket, paying eighteenpence to go to Nola Baiano and return. Even the second-class was jammed to suffocation; everyone was going to the cemetery. One carried a package of candles to burn before the tombs; another a small wreath of false pearls; another a wreath of yellow immortelles, upon which was an inscription in letters of black velvet; others carried flowers; some people took nothing at all; but all—men, women, and children—were dressed in black, and nearly all were sad and silent; many doubtless oppressed by the recollection of long-passed sorrows, others still wincing under the agony of a recent wound; some grown mournfully indifferent, but oppressed by the melancholy of the scene, the painful journey, the gray, overhanging sky.

Most of the people who travelled by train that day were small shopkeepers, or mechanics, or servants, and not a few belonged to the religious congregations which throng the chapels of Paggioreale, and which form a vast association of mutual aid, an immense

burial society, to which belong most Neapolitans of the lower class.

Carmela was silent; she pulled her coarse black veil over her face and bent down her head, oppressed by the melancholy of her surroundings and her own sad thoughts; she felt so deserted and alone.

'Paggioreale! Paggioreale!' shouted the conductor, as they approached the little station; and instantly the train was emptied, as if by magic, and the travellers, carrying their offerings, hastened to climb the hill leading to the cemetery.

The gate of the cemetery was surrounded by vehicles of all kinds—omnibuses, calèches, char-a-bancs, carts, coupés—all waiting, the horses eating their fodder, the coachmen smoking and chatting quietly, or looking for a restaurant in which to eat and drink in comfort while their fares were away on their lugubrious errand. Notwithstanding the gloomy November day, and the gray, low-hanging sky, the cemetery of Paggioreale (which occupies one of the loveliest hills near Naples) still preserved its usual aspect—that of a vast, blooming, and splendid palace garden; and the beds of brilliant flowers which encircle the graves, the hedges of bay and yew which border the shady walks and divide them from the fields paved with mortuary slabs, the groves of trees where the birds sing all day, the taller trees which overshadow the tiny chapels and miniature churches with which the cemetery is crowded—all this luxury

of beauty and ornament preserves in all seasons an aspect of grandeur and dignity, like an aristocratic park, with here and there a pretty or a majestic building.

Gardeners work all the year round in these enclosures, under the direction of a person who loves this beautiful cemetery, and here bloom the lovely roses for which Naples is so famous, as well as chrysanthemums of every shade. The whole vast space—even the poorer quarter of the cemetery—is enamelled with these charming flowers; a sweet spring smiles here in the very face of death, so that Paggioreale is never sad in its blooming solitude. But on All Saints' Day the avenues are crowded by persons dressed in black. The doors of the various mortuary chapels, churches, and large monuments are all open, tapers gleam within, clouds of incense fill the air with a perfume which mingles with that of innumerable flowers, and the whole scene has something strange in it; it is like—if such a thing could be—a vast mortuary fair, or some mysterious function for the dead to which all the world has been summoned to assist.

Carmela joined the crowd, which climbed slowly to the top of the hill, where the finest monuments are to be found. The avenue through which they passed was bordered by a low wall, covered with marble slabs, and each slab was a monument, with a date of some thirty, forty, or fifty years before.

Carmela read two or three inscriptions, and then had a movement of indifference. What mattered it to her that all these people—men, women, and children, now dead—had died so long ago? They were nothing to her, and perhaps nothing to anyone about her. Forty—fifty years! Too long, surely, for the dead to be remembered by the living.

Here and there, among the beds of roses and cinerarias, and all those pretty, small, gray, lilac and purple autumn flowers which God seems to have created for the service of the dead, groups of two or three persons busied themselves about the flat tombstones, cleaning them with tender care, laying wreaths upon them, and planting tall wax tapers in the earth beside them, tapers which burned with pale tongues of flame in the broad daylight. Every now and then someone would kneel on the ground and pray, regardless of passers-by, or the silence would be broken by sobs from the mourners about some recent grave, generally women closely veiled; while from every chapel, and church, and mausoleum rose the strains of the 'De Profundis' and the 'Libera,' and against the dark rocky walls within gleamed the light of innumerable tapers, and the perfume of incense floated in the air.

Carmela Minino, exhausted, feeling an unbearable oppression in soul and body, could hardly proceed; a wild desire possessed her, a wild wish to throw away her wreath, and to fall face downward on the

earth and weep—weep until death came to take her where she lay!

Suddenly, as if by magic, the lofty monument dedicated to Amina Boschetti rose before her. It stood in a quadrangle bordered by tall cypress-trees, and was surrounded by beds of fragrant flowers; opposite was the mortuary chapel belonging to the princes of Santenero; and on the left the memorial church built in honour of the young Duchess of Naja; but the dancer's mausoleum was larger and grander than that of either of the two patricians. The architecture was purely Egyptian, an exact imitation of one of the tombs of the Pharaohs, built in dark granite and shining gray basalt; the bronze doors, finely modelled and delicately finished, were wide open, and so were the gates which enclosed the flower garden. Looked at from a distance, the Egyptian temple which enclosed the airy form of the dancer looked heavy and clumsy, as, in fact, this form of architecture always appears, even in the land to which it belongs; but a nearer approach revealed the majesty and grandeur of the lines, and the first glance at this splendid mausoleum sufficed to tranquillize Carmela and give her courage. The name 'Amina Boschetti,' inscribed in letters of gilded bronze above the door, seemed to infuse new life in her veins, and, as she gradually approached the magnificent temple where the wealth and beauty and power of her godmother received

the consecration of a supreme triumph even in death, a certain exaltation took possession of Carmela's soul, which caused her little heart to swell with tender pride. All her sad feelings were replaced by a strange, inexplicable sensation, which yet was not pain, as she entered the temple, piously crossing herself.

The mausoleum was richly adorned in honour of Amina Boschetti's memory. Four magnificent silver lamps, in which votive oil was burning, suspended by massive silver chains, hung from the ceiling; four tall and richly-ornamented taper stands, supporting huge wax tapers, were placed before the small funeral altar, which had been arranged below the stone which covered the body of the dead girl. The floor and walls of the mausoleum were literally covered by the freshest and rarest flowers. Loose flowers covered the pavement and were heaped on the tomb. A priest, assisted by two others, all arrayed in the richest vestments compatible with the ceremonies of the day, was celebrating the twelfth Mass that had been said that day. He had succeeded other priests, and other priests would succeed him until three o'clock in the afternoon. Two acolytes, meanwhile, swung silver censers, from which rose clouds of perfume, and on either side of the entrance stood, silent and motionless, two lackeys in gorgeous livery—the livery of the banker Schulte, who had adored the graceful ballet-dancer in life,

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had heaped wealth upon her, and now, faithful even in death, in a strange mixture of love and mysticism and cynicism, honoured her memory with all the splendour allowed by the Catholic ritual. He had come early to the mortuary chapel that day, had arranged the flowers himself, and had prayed for an hour. He could not console himself, nor forget. One of the lackeys took Carmela's wreath, in order to place it near the altar.

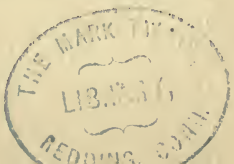
'On the tomb—on the tomb itself!' she murmured, trembling with an emotion which was not all pain, which almost was not pain at all.

And when the wreath had been placed, leaning against the marble monument, just where, behind the cold stone, reposed the colder heart of Amina Boschetti, her goddaughter knelt on the carved prie dieu in front of the altar, and there, where Otto Schulte had prayed an hour before, she buried her face in her hands and wept. While the priest prayed, pronouncing the solemn and mournful words of the Mass for the Dead, while the cry of the Christian soul, which implores mercy before the eternal Judge, rose up in the old immortal words of the liturgy, Carmela could not pray. Instead, she saw before her, as vividly as in life, the fair creature for whom that rich mausoleum had been built, for whom lamps and tapers burned, and flowers gave forth their perfume, and the priests before the altar offered up the Mass. And she saw

a delicate, spiritual face, two large dark eyes, at once smiling and thoughtful, a smile curving lips exquisite in form and expression, a fascination emanating from every movement—a fascination all beauty, grace, youth, and poetry, something fugitive, and airy, and ineffable, which seemed to flash and glimmer as she moved in her floating draperies, and which fascinated not only the old, but the young, not only men, but women.

Amina Boschetti! She shone upon the dim, overcrowded theatres like a star! Slight as a reed, her small head crowned with masses of dark waving hair, her delicate form clad in a glittering corselet and clouds of white tulle, her tiny feet shod in pink silk stockings and slippers, she scarcely touched the earth as she danced, and moved with such airy lightness that her feet seemed to be weaving mystic ciphers on the flower-strewn stage. And she smiled the while with eyes and lips, her flexible form swaying like a flower in the wind. Fatigue never assailed her; she danced as if she had come to the earth for that, and that alone. And the charm of her art rapt all classes, all ages, in a common ecstasy. An adoring public loaded her with gifts and offerings, hearts and fortunes alike were laid at her feet, and she accepted all—love and wealth, and jewels and lands—as if all were hers by an imprescriptible right—the right of the incomparable grace of her airy dance.

She had villas at Portici and Pausilippo, palaces



in Naples, sumptuous furniture, the richest equipages, jewels worthy of a reigning Sovereign, and she accepted all and possessed all with the same girlish, thoughtless grace, giving in return her beauty and her art. Carmela Minino from infancy had admired and loved her as a divinity. To Carmela all this delirium of admiration seemed natural enough; had the whole world been thrown at Amina's feet, the homage would, in Carmela's opinion, have been no more than her due.

The Mass was drawing to its close. But Carmela, though she was a humble and sincere Christian, had not yet prayed for the soul of her godmother. She had been absorbed in her recollections, and she remembered how the beautiful ballet-dancer had illumined her modest little life, so full of gloom and poverty, and how she used to go to see her in her magnificent palace at Naples or the lovely villa at Portici, surrounded by gardens and looking out upon the sea.

Carmela's mother, whose trade was that of a mender of silk tights, had known the Boschetti. When she was beginning her career, and later, when she was in full glory, Bettina Minino received from her her cast-off silk tights and stockings and pink satin shoes. None of these things were much worn, and Bettina used to sell them. At this time Carmela was ten years old and had splendid dark eyes and hair. She promised to be pretty, and

though this promise was never fulfilled, the eyes and hair were still handsome.

When her mother was working for the Boschetti, Carmela used to sit in a corner of the hall and wait. Sometimes the Boschetti would flit past, clad in the white woollen gowns she always wore at home. Every time she passed she smiled at the little girl or patted her on the head, and the child's eyes would brighten at the radiant apparition.

'Eh! Have her taught to dance! have her taught to dance!' said the Boschetti, when Bettina would groan as she thought of her child's future.

'And if she should be ugly, Excellency?'

'Let us hope not.'

'And if she should lose body and soul in the theatre?'

'What is lost can be found again,' replied the Boschetti, laughing.

It ended by the Boschetti's paying twenty-five francs a month for years, in order that Carmela might be taught to dance.

Alas! poor little Carmela lacked grace and lightness and animation. She studied hard, she worked enormously, she was obedient, submissive to the master's admonitions, but she lacked the qualities necessary for a dancer. And when she was about sixteen, instead of blooming out into a pretty girl, she seemed to fade. Her complexion grew thick and opaque, her lips pale, the lines about her chin and

cheek-bones hardened. Perhaps she ate too little; perhaps she danced too much; perhaps she suffered from the lack of light and air, there being little of either in the Vicolo Paradiso. But certain it is, hers was a pale, faded youth, her only good points being her beautiful eyes, both proud and sad, and her superb hair—beauties which she shared in common with all Neapolitans of the lower classes.

'My dear lady, she is ugly—ugly!' said Bettina Minino to her benefactress, with many tears.

'Patience! If she is ugly she will not lose her soul,' answered the Boschetti, smiling.

And, owing solely to her powerful influence, Carmela Minino was accepted as a member of the *corps de ballet* at San Carlo, but in the very last row, at two francs and a half for every night she danced, and with the condition of furnishing herself her silk tights and slippers, tulle skirts and bodices; obliged also to come to the theatre with her hair well dressed, or to have it dressed by the stage hairdresser—with so many obligations, in short, that the two francs and a half were reduced to nothing. In fact, her being allowed to dance at San Carlo at all was esteemed a favour, although she danced in the very last row, because poor Carmela was ugly, and ugly dancers were not wanted at San Carlo, and her face was so dull; she never smiled, and her eyes were so sad! Still, she danced, and with her own earnings and those of her mother, and the twenty-five francs

allowed them by the Boschetti, they managed to get on, when, suddenly, Amina Boschetti died.

The Mass was over; the priest, aided by two assistants, sprinkled the tomb with holy water, and instead of praying for her who for six years had slept the eternal sleep of death beneath the granite mausoleum, Carmela thought of Amina Boschetti's death. She had seen her dance for the last time in a magnificent Egyptian ballet, 'The Daughters of Cheops.'

The two daughters of Cheops were represented by a tall, beautiful girl, Assunta Mezzanotti, afterwards an actress of small reputation, and another sister, the rival, was Amina Boschetti, the star of the piece. For many nights, clad in an Oriental dress laden with antique jewels, and with the golden *ibis* crowning her dark hair, Amina Boschetti had danced, and had done more: she had lifted the ballet to the rank of a drama, almost a tragedy.

The daughters of Cheops were rivals in love, and the younger, crossed in love, died by her own hand. In the last scene she appeared at a sacred feast, beautiful with a strange, fatal beauty, covered with gold and precious stones, and with an ecstatic and intoxicating smile upon her lips and the light of madness in her gleaming eyes. And then began the religious dance with a serpent—the serpent sacred to the Egyptian deities—which she wound round her arms, her body, trifling and playing with it, and

swaying in graceful curves as the serpent's head approached her head and face, throwing it suddenly aside in pretended terror, then winding the serpent round her in a whirling dance. And as the passion of the dance increased, Amina's thick hair fell upon her shoulders; she danced with mad intensity, as if convulsed, until the supreme moment when she placed the serpent's head on her bare bosom, was bitten, and fell and died, amid the horror of the spectators.

In this ballet, and especially in the last scene, Amina Boschetti passed beyond the limits of a ballet-dancer; she became a really great tragic actress, and profoundly moved her admiring audience.

Four days after the theatre was closed for the season, and four days after her last brilliant triumph, Amina Boschetti died suddenly, cut off in the heyday of her youth and beauty by the rupture of an aneurism. No one had known that her heart was affected; perhaps she alone had known it.

To Carmela's limited intelligence her fairy godmother had seemed a supernatural being—a thing of dreams. And now the surroundings, the temple-like mausoleum, the silver lamps, the incense, the flowers, the ceaseless prayers, the love, the splendour which that love had heaped upon Amina's grave—did not all these things prove that she was an enchantress still? Was she not only unforgotten, but unforgetable, like the supreme essence of poesy? No new

artist had ever awakened the same ardent enthusiasm; she was still lamented whenever a new dancer appeared at San Carlo; her place was still empty there, as in the heart of her lover. And no one, nothing, had ever taken her place in Carmela Minino's poor and obscure existence. And now, alone, kneeling before the beloved name inscribed on the tomb, Carmela promised and vowed to do always what her dead godmother had wished her to do. Hers was a hard, wearisome profession, full of dangers and troubles, bringing her only her bare bread, leaving her whole months without work, exposing her to the illusions and humiliations and disappointments of the horrible theatre, giving her the choice between starvation and dishonour, destined, perhaps, to reduce her to beggary or the hospital. But what did it matter? Amina had chosen it for her; and Carmela bowed her head in acquiescence, in a very delirium of obedience and devotion, which overleaped death and the grave. And in this fever of love and sacrifice Carmela entirely forgot to pray. With the childish simplicity so common in Neapolitans of the lower classes, and the naïve hopefulness of a passionate heart, she told herself that she was certain that the Lord had forgiven all Amina Boschetti's sins.

Carmela reached Naples at five o'clock. It was almost dark. This time, in order to reach home more quickly, she turned away from the railway-

station and crossed Via Cirillo and Via Faria. By the time she reached the National Museum the rain began to fall thick and fast, and fearing to spoil her clothes, she turned into the arcade called the Galleria del Principe di Napoli, where hundreds of other people without umbrellas, or with worn-out umbrellas, were waiting for the rain to pass. It was late for Carmela to be out, and when the rain ceased she went down the steps which led from the Galleria to the Toledo, and as she passed noticed a superb coupé which stood before the arch of the Galleria. Standing on the pavement, and leaning on the open window of the carriage in such a way as to hide the person within, stood a gentleman, talking earnestly and listening to the replies he received as eagerly as he talked. Although his back was turned, and he had changed his dress, Carmela instantly recognised Count Ferdinando Terzi. She knew already that his relation with Emilia Tromba was only a mask for a dangerous and violent passion for a young married woman in his own rank of life, and instinctively she stopped and tried to see the person who was sitting in the coupé. She knew the name and the sweet, thoughtful face of the young Marchesa who was said to love Ferdinando Terzi with a passion which equalled his own ; the ballet-dancers were all fond of gossip about the love-affairs of the aristocracy. Carmela was sure she should recognise her face in a moment. But the rain was falling, the gray

November day was drawing fast to darkness, and though Carmela passed round the carriage, she could distinguish no one. She walked slowly along the opposite pavement, turning once or twice. The coupé stood still in its place. Ferdinando Terzi turned once and looked round suspiciously, then resumed his conversation. But at that hour, in such weather, so far from the aristocratic quarter, on such a rainy, dark evening, it was not likely that anyone would recognise either the occupant of the coupé or himself. In fact, no one did so but the humble creature who, wet and weary from her long expedition to the cemetery, was trudging dinnerless to the lonely room where a meagre supper awaited her.

A little further on, near Piazza Dante, at the door of Gutteridge's shop, an amiable voice interrupted Carmela's meditations.

'Oh, Signorina Minino, good-evening. Won't you even bow to me?'

'Good-evening, good-evening,' she answered, startled, stopping for a moment, and instantly regretting having done so.

'Come in a moment, signorina,' answered the young man, moving away from the door.

'No, I cannot, Signor Gargiulo; I am in a hurry.'

'Always like this. And where do you come from, always so nice and pleasant, and never nice and pleasant to me? Have you come from a rehearsal?'

'At this hour!' she murmured. 'No, I have been to the cemetery.'

'Excuse me,' said Gargiulo, embarrassed, 'are you going home? May I come with you a little way?'

'No, no, thank you; you have your shop to attend to.'

'Oh, it is so late; no more customers will come this evening. I shall ask a friend to take my place at the desk. May I come with you?'

'No, Signor Gargiulo, thank you. Good-evening,' she answered, quickly moving away.

The young cashier was a little annoyed, but he looked after Carmela's retreating figure with the same fatuous smile which was his habitual expression. He was tall and thin, olive-skinned, with a dark moustache of which he was vain; his black hair was cut short and brushed back from his forehead, and his meagreness was not devoid of a certain grace. He was fluent and facile of speech, as clerks are apt to be, and he had a certain varnish of good manners, with long, well-kept nails, and a diamond on his little finger, living with difficulty on his salary as cashier, but always well dressed, as is usually the case with young clerks, wearing even a smoking-suit occasionally. He was a regular frequenter of all the theatres and public halls, and had, in fact, a free pass for the theatre, given by a friend who was a journalist. With this same friend he sometimes went to see the

ballet-dancers leave San Carlo, and there he had often seen Carmela Minino pass, invariably alone, and he had spoken to her occasionally in order that he too might seem to have a ballet-dancer under his protection.

'Let her alone,' his friend had murmured in his ear. 'She is ugly, and she is an honest girl.'

'Are you certain of that?'

'Absolutely certain. There are eight or ten of the girls who dance at San Carlo who are still perfectly honest women. The Minino is one of them.'

'Then it would be dangerous to have anything to do with her?'

'Naturally.'

Nothing more had passed between them, but whenever he met her Roberto Gargiulo never failed to speak to Carmela, to make her marked compliments, and pointed hints and allusions to his feeling for her. She answered little or nothing, and always managed to get rid of him and go away as quickly as possible. But Gargiulo, who had made one or two conquests in his own little world, was convinced that if he persisted in courting her and were to give her a present or two, Carmela Minino would end by falling in love with him. Was it, however, worth while for him to insist, now that he knew that she was an honest girl? worth while to risk the consequences, to bear the chain of such a relation? Perhaps later—who knew? And meanwhile, every

time she cut short his pretty speeches he smiled the fatuous smile of the seducer who does not insist.

Carmela quickened her steps toward Pignasecca. She had shrugged her shoulders as she left Roberto Gargiulo. She neither liked nor disliked him, but in dealing with him she used the weapons of defence usually employed by women who are afraid of loving and going wrong. Believing herself even plainer than she really was, she was instinctively and almost savagely afraid of any attention from men. She felt so convinced that such attentions were a mere trap to make her fall, that she might be despised and laughed at afterwards. Conscious of her own inferiority and insignificance in the great social system, feeling herself a poor atom without strength or courage, she felt vaguely that some day this would happen. But meanwhile she struggled bravely on from day to day, repulsing everyone alike, and adopting all the means of defence in her power, however puerile. She avoided the company of others, or any chance of making new acquaintances, and became daily more shy and ungraceful. She received very little attention, being so plain and lonely and badly dressed, and dancing always in the last row of dancers without a single jewel or flower in her hair; but every now and then someone, Roberto Gargiulo, or Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio, the Cavaliere Gabriele Scagnamiglio, the rich druggist, an habitué of San Carlo, who lived in the Piazza della Pignasecca, or

the son of the stage-director—one or other of these personages would pursue her for a week, saying always the same words, wanting the same thing, to make her fall into sin, and, fallen, to abandon her at once.

No, no, she would have none of them; she avoided them as much as she could, and cut short their compliments without mercy.

'Good-evening, Donna Carmelina,' said a man's voice as she entered the piazza of the Pignasecca.

'Here is the other,' murmured Carmela to herself. 'Good-evening, cavaliere.'

It was Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio, the rich druggist, an unrepentant celibate, a famous admirer of women, a man already more than fifty-five years old, whose white beard was always well trimmed and perfumed, who was always neat and well dressed, wearing full dress every evening, knowing how to talk to the fair sex, but cold and calculating to the very depth of his soul.

'Donna Carmela, will you dine with me at Frisio this evening?'

'Thanks, cavaliere; I have already dined.'

'Then we will go together to the café concert, Donna Carmela. What do you say to that? After midnight we will have supper.'

'Good-evening; good amusement, cavaliere,' she said hastily, walking on.

'You are really and truly a goose, Donna Carmela;

you will repent it,' he answered, laughing, as he called a cab to go to his dinner.

Ah! when she was at home, in the damp room on the fourth floor, a mortal weariness oppressed her. With a great effort she dragged herself to the table, where she lit a petroleum lamp, and with an equal effort she went into the kitchen, lit a fire, and cooked two eggs which she had in the house. She had nothing else for supper, and would have died of hunger rather than crawl down the four pairs of stairs to buy herself something else. She was mortally tired, and oppressed by a sense of moral lassitude and secret melancholy; and as she ate her meagre supper on a corner of the bare kitchen table, and by the light of a smoky lamp, she thought that she was a goose, as Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio had said. But she did not regret it that evening.

II

A BELL rang loudly, and continued to tinkle near the little kitchen window. Carmela put her head out, and looked down into the narrow, dark, damp court, upon which all the other kitchen windows opened. Down at the very bottom she saw a female face looking up.

'Donna Carmela, is it time? Can I come up?' said a rough female voice from the depths.

'Come up—come up, Gaetanella!' she replied.

She returned to her room, and took up the work at which she had been toiling slowly and patiently, although it was Sunday. This work was the careful mending of her best pair of silk tights, which, to her sorrow, was beginning to show signs of wear and tear.

She possessed three pairs of tights, and had not bought a new pair for a long time; the oldest pair was so worn and discoloured that by the light of the footlights it looked quite white, and she could no longer wear it. She still kept it, however, for economical reasons. The second pair of tights was still pink, but she no longer dared to wear it at San Carlo; she only used it in the summer, when she

danced at Santa Maria di Capua, or Lecce, or Catanzaro, provincial theatres where artists only go for bare bread, and do not always get that. At San Carlo, where the impresario, the ballet-master, and the stage-director were all equally exacting and brutal with regard to the dress of the ballet-girls, the tights, the silk slippers, and the tulle skirts, almost all things which the girls were expected to pay for, Carmela did not dare to wear any but her best tights, and she daily examined and mended them with the most scrupulous care, trembling lest she should have to buy a new pair at twenty-eight francs! Her mother had taught her her own poor trade, that of a mender of silk tights—taught her, probably, that she might not die of hunger.

Gaetanella, the hairdresser, entered without knocking, and, after having saluted her client, let down the white apron which she wore twisted round her waist, and, taking a towel, spread it over Carmela's shoulders, as she sat before an old-fashioned looking-glass.

'So there is a ballet to-day, Donna Carmela?'

'Yes, twice—a day and an evening ballet, my dear Gaetanella.'

'What! this very last Sunday in carnival?'

'You know we dance twice a day the last four Sundays of carnival. There are no holidays for us,' sighed the dancer.

'To-morrow, too? And the day after to-morrow?'

said the hairdresser, as she shook out and combed Carmela's long rich hair.

'The two last days of carnival. Double representation,' murmured Carmela. 'On such days we just die of fatigue.'

They were both silent for a moment. The hairdresser was a young woman, short, pitted with small-pox, with a coiffure which made her abundant dark hair look like a helmet, with a little blue woollen shawl crossed over her bosom, and a garnet-coloured gown of coarse wool. She wore heavy, creaking, high-heeled shoes. As she arranged Carmela's hair with a mechanical rapidity which was marvellous, her thin, brown, bony hands, laden with coarse rings, were, in certain movements, grotesquely like a monkey's paws.

'And this evening you get home late?' said Gaetanella, as she tied a thick lock of hair with a shoelace.

'About an hour after midnight.'

'All alone? Are you not afraid?'

'Yes, sometimes.'

All the misery of this return from the theatre late at night, alone, by an unfrequented route, and through a quarter of the city where she was exposed both to danger and annoyance, was written on her face.

'I would make some relation accompany me,' said Gaetanella.

'I have not a relation in the world. Perhaps a friend would accompany me if I would allow it, but I cannot.'

'You do right,' responded Gaetanella promptly, understanding what she meant. 'May the Madonna preserve you in the same disposition of mind.'

Gaetanella knew that the ballet-dancer was an honest girl. In the Vicolo Paradiso, where she lived, everyone knew that Carmela Minino always returned home alone; that she received no visits, no letters, and no flowers; that she went alone to the theatre and to church; and that she was so poor because she had no protector. From the fruit-seller, a hideous witch who scolded from morning till night, to the charcoal vendor, who, with hands as black as the coal she sold, knitted a dirty stocking at the door of her grimy shop; from the pastry-cook Don Santo, who sold ices in summer, to the bootblack on the corner, a boastful rascal—everyone praised Carmela's virtues.

The edifice which, in accordance with the reigning fashion, the spare, alert hands of Gaetanella were erecting on Carmela's head, began to take the tower-like aspect then in vogue.

'Lift up the fringe, please, Gaetanella.'

The fringe covered half her forehead; it was already rather out of fashion, but Carmela had always worn it.

'You will look very badly without the fringe,' said

Gaetanella, stopping, and looking at Carmela in the glass.

'I know it!' exclaimed the coryphée, sighing; 'but on the stage no one wears it any longer. They laugh at me because my coiffure is so old-fashioned.'

'Don't mind them; they are envious.'

'Even the director of the ballet has scolded me. Try to lift it up,' she repeated.

In fact, Gaetanella was already lifting up the fringe with invisible hairpins. Carmela's forehead, already too high, appeared bare and nude; her long face longer than ever.

'How much uglier I am with my hair like that!' she said, as she looked at herself. Her tones were as full of sincerity as of bitterness.

'Yes, you do not look well like that. Now I will let down your fringe again.'

'Never mind,' said Carmela resignedly. 'I prefer not to be scolded.'

While Gaetanella put the last touches to the coiffure by adding big glittering aigrettes and pins of false pearls, emeralds, and diamonds, Carmela looked in the glass again, and thought herself uglier than ever. Her bare forehead seemed enormous. She did not open her lips. The hairdresser had finished. She pulled the fallen hairs out of the comb, twisted them into a ball, which she placed on the toilet-table; she blew into her hands, and rolled the white apron anew round her waist.

Carmela took fourpence out of her pocket, and handed them to her in payment for her work. In point of fact, Gaetanella usually was paid by the month by all the women in the neighbourhood—three or four francs a month, which reduced the daily payment to twopence a head. But Carmela arranged her own hair, except on ballet days, so there was no question of a monthly payment for her. As there was a ballet at San Carlo fifteen days out of every thirty, it came to nearly the same thing in point of expense; but the poor coryphée preferred to pay each time her hair was dressed; the fourpence did not then weigh so heavily upon her. Furlai, the theatre hairdresser, asked six and often eight francs a month. Carmela could not think of such a price as that; she had no protector, old or young.

'To-morrow—at what hour?' said Gaetanella, on the threshold.

'Always at two precisely, I beg of you.'

'Don't be afraid; I will be here.'

The door closed. Carmela crossed the room to look at an old silver watch which her mother had left her; it was half-past two. She must hurry. When there was, as to-day, a double representation, the impresario compelled the ballet-girls to be at San Carlo at three o'clock, the hour when the opera began. If they did not arrive until half-past three they were fined a franc; after that hour they forfeited the payment for their day's work. It was

cruelty, the girls thought, to oblige them to be there three hours before the ballet began, in the bare, ill-smelling rooms, warmed only by the gas-burners, where four, eight, or twelve girls, as the case might be, were forced to dress and undress in the same room. But complaints, protests, and outcries were alike useless; there was no trifling with the rules of the theatre.

On Sundays they were forced to be in the theatre at three o'clock in the afternoon, and could not leave it until an hour after midnight—thirteen hours of hard work and wearisome, enforced idleness, shut in with glaring gaslight and the evil odours of many breaths, nasty cheap perfumes, and other smells, more nauseating still. Many of the girls availed themselves of the hour's rest allowed between the morning and evening representations and ran home for a few minutes. But was it not worse to dress, undress, run home, and run back? A dog's life, truly, in carnival, when all the world amuses itself!

So, with that monotony of gesture which indicates long-established habit, Carmela put in a long narrow pasteboard box her white tarlatan skirts. They were new, and fresh, and floating, as tarlatan always is at first; but after one or two evenings how crushed and faded they would be! She added her pink satin slippers, no longer new, alas! and only wearable for two or three more evenings; and they cost four francs! She put in also two or three little china pots

containing a little rouge, a little cold cream, a little pearl-powder. With these she placed a semi-bald little powder-puff and a hare's foot nearly bare of fur. Was there nothing else? No, nothing. Her forlorn baggage of third-rate ballet-dancer, with a salary of three francs and a half a day, was complete in its perfect poverty.

Suddenly, for a moment only, she was overwhelmed with melancholy. She thought of Emilia Tromba, who, although only a dancer in the first row—nothing more than a *guide*—simply because she was beautiful, shameless, and insolent, could bring to the theatre a *nécessaire* of solid silver, with her monogram engraved upon it. All the little pots and bottles in the *nécessaire* were filled with the finest and rarest cosmetics, which Emilia used liberally, laughing, screaming, and cursing the while with the coarse, rough voice which contrasted so strangely with her pure and exquisite beauty; and had not this *nécessaire* been given by Count Ferdinando Terzi? The gentleman with the cold blue eyes which were so limpid and proud, and who surveyed everything and everybody with the same glance of superb indifference, had presented this gift (costing more than a thousand francs, it was said) to Emilia on her birthday, apparently just to make the other ballet-dancers envious.

But it was late. Carmela called the son of the portress, an urchin of twelve years old, and gave him her box to carry. The boy carried it every day to

San Carlo and home again for a few pence a week. Carmela would have been ashamed to carry this box through the streets; it would have been an advertisement of her profession, and people would have turned to look at her.

When the boy had gone, jumping down four steps at a time, Carmela, reflecting on the thirteen hours of imprisonment which lay before her, put two slices of bread in a newspaper. The bread was spread thickly with the Sunday ragout, which she had cooked herself. To this she added a red apple and a knife with which to peel it. She folded her lunch up neatly, and prepared to carry it under her arm, glad to have a mouthful to eat between the afternoon and evening representations. She went towards the bed, and repeated mentally an *Ave Maria* to the Madonna of Pompeii which hung at the head of the bed; three *Gloria Patris* to Sant' Antonio, for whom she had a special devotion on account of the graces obtained by him—thirteen a day; and finally she put her rosary in her pocket from force of habit.

As she went to put on her hat before the glass she saw a letter lying on the toilet-table. This she opened and reread. The letter, written in a style half romantic and half burlesque, was from Roberto Gargiulo, the cashier of Gutteridge's shop. The young man that winter had been often—too often—at San Carlo, and hearing that all the regular habitués of the theatre had each a *chère amie* among the ballet-

dancers—hearing continually of the conquests of this or that Don Juan, seeing Carmela dance every evening, knowing that she had not a lover and was very modest and reserved, without being absolutely unapproachable, he had ended by making her declarations of affection in prose and verse—the verses he copied wherever he could find them—and he used to wait for her at the door of the theatre. His dream would have been to sit in a fauteuil in evening dress, with a flower in his buttonhole, but he was only a poor clerk in a shop! Carmela persisted in saying 'No' with the constant and desperate iteration of the blindly obstinate, but the letters did not displease her. And she obeyed an impulse of vanity in putting Roberto Gargiulo's last letter in her pocket, a letter which she had not answered.

Whenever they had a few minutes' rest in the big rooms where they dressed the ballet-dancers used to read over the letters received from their admirers. And at twenty minutes before three, punctual as a soldier, Carmela Minino, shivering a little in her black cloth mantle, and holding her package of food carefully concealed under her arm, issued from the door of the house, and with light, cautious, measured steps, took her way to San Carlo.

They were eight in the large, oblong room—the eight ballet-dancers of the third row: Checchina Cozzolino, with a swelled, flabby face, black hair,

and little Chinese eyes; she was the daughter of a portress, and was protected by the physician of the theatre; she was full of presumption, but never had a penny to buy even a package of pearl-powder. Rosina Musto, forty years old, ugly, and rather awkward, but always witty and cheerful, having for her protector a shopkeeper who dealt in groceries—Sambrini, who had a shop in the Via Baglivo Uries. Carlotta Musto, her sister, younger by ten years, who had married a machinist, separated from him, and now had a mysterious jealous lover, whom no one ever saw. Marietta Sanges, a blonde, with feet and hands like those of a carter, and so tall that she dwarfed the other dancers; she had a notary as a protector, and he generously allowed her a hundred and fifty francs a month, most of which she prudently saved, with a view to the time when the notary should have taken flight. Giuseppina Mastrachio, daughter of the second male dancer, small, thin, cross, the mother of two children, whom she vainly tried to impose upon her various lovers. Margharita de Santis, a pretty, graceful, elegant creature, with the pallor and white lips of the anæmic, always ill and continually taking pills and powders; fortunate, however, in her protector, a rich leather merchant, who supported her liberally. And, finally, Filomena Scoppa. Filomena, though only eighteen, was prudent as well as honest. She intended to marry, and marry well, having small faith in troublesome,

jealous, and avaricious lovers, who often abandoned their mistresses without a word of preparation.

The six ballet-dancers already mentioned, who were all more or less well provided with lovers, affected to despise the two honest girls Carmela and Filomena, and they, in their turn, looked down upon the others. Carmela preserved a proud silence; Filomena was noisy and impertinent. She was a fat, stupid girl, pretty as dimples and a pink and white complexion could make her, but she was both dirty and slovenly.

Now all the ballet-girls were dressing for the 'Excelsior,' and were doing so as noisily as possible, laughing, shouting, screaming, upsetting chairs, and producing an endless confusion. Most of them had loud, harsh, nasal voices, some hoarse and low-pitched, others sharp and grinding, and all vulgar. The Neapolitan dialect was spoken almost without exception, though here and there a Lombard or Piedmontese accent was heard.

Curses, obscene words, flew about like hail in a storm. All the girls were too nervous and hurried to care what they said, though here and there some of the more prudent ones affected to be shocked at the others.

The dressing-rooms were little more than long, lofty corridors with wooden floors, the boards of which were so badly joined that the ballet-girls frequently spoiled the wooden heels of their shoes,

as well as their pink satin dancing-slippers; but as the impresario did not furnish the shoes, he did not care how many they spoiled. The walls of the dressing-room were roughly whitewashed, and great blotches of damp showed through the whitewash, as if the walls were afflicted with an ignoble leprosy; three huge gas-jets projected above the dressing-table, and flared broadly, heating the air to furnace heat, and illuminating mercilessly a table which ran the length of the room, and was the common property of the eight dancers who inhabited it. It was loaded with looking-glasses, washbowls, vases of rouge, cold cream, pearl-powder, and brushes, hair-pins, and false jewels. Before this table stood the dancers, half dressed, painting and powdering themselves, rubbing their arms with cold cream, fastening artificial flowers, or *strass*, in their hair, or tightening their corsets to the point of suffocation. And all this in a strange hurry and confusion, accompanied by the protests and grimaces of the more modest and ill-formed, who hated to dress and undress before the others, while some of the girls boldly lounged about in their chemises, complaining of the heat. And, indeed, the dressing-room was as hot as a furnace, and reeked with the odour of perspiration and many breaths, and numberless cosmetics and cheap perfumes. On the rickety chairs were thrown the various costumes for 'Excelsior'; the girls hung their out-of-door clothes on nails which ran the

length of the wall. Poor enough they were—partly because those who had decent garments were afraid of spoiling them if they brought them to the theatre, but mainly because, as a rule, the poor things had no decent clothes to wear, so poorly were they paid, and often their lovers were anything but generous.

Marietta Sanges and Carlotta Musto, who had men of substance for protectors, were comfortably clad, with silk underskirts and coloured corsets; the other coryphées wore the coarsest cotton underclothes, and knitted cotton stockings; their corsets were those which are sold for three francs and a half.

Filomena Scoppa, who was as remarkable for dirt as for virtue, had hung up a petticoat which was soaked in mud, and a pair of stockings which were absolutely filthy.

'But you—you will wash your face, I hope!' screamed Checchina Cozzolino, disgusted.

'Think of your own dirty doings!' replied Filomena insolently.

They were all more or less nervous, and furiously cross at having to dance on these carnival days, when everybody was either resting or indulging in some amusement. And, then, the being forced to dance twice within twelve hours, only snatching a mouthful of food between the morning and evening representations, and fasting until long after midnight, being forced to leave their homes and their lovers to come and 'trip the light fantastic toe'! Ardently

did they hate the day representations, made for children and their nurses, and for the families of the smaller shopkeepers. From such a tiresome public no solid benefit could be expected, and the ballet-girls hated it accordingly. In the evening, when all the fine gentlemen were in their stalls, there was something to look forward to, for there was always the chance of acquiring protectors of importance, and the triumph of tearing them away from the countesses, duchesses, and marchionesses of the best society, who were supposed to adore them. Many of the best ballet-dancers stayed away altogether in the daytime. In fact, a matinée of the 'Excelsior' was but the shadow of the real thing.

'Concetta Giura is not here,' said Carlotta Musto to her sister Rosina. 'Lucky girl to be able to stay away!'

'And you—couldn't you stay away just as well? Is it necessary for you to dance?'

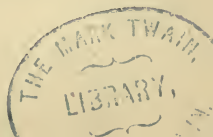
'Yes, it is—very,' answered Carlotta, who always made a mystery of her affairs.

'Meanwhile she is at Sorrento with the Duke of Sanframondi. They won't get back until this evening.'

'Does he spend much?'

'A good deal; but not as much as he used to do,' answered Carlotta, who was always well posted.

Several of the girls sighed. Checchina Cozzolino, who never had a penny in her pocket, grumbled:



'The devil take my bad luck!'

A loud knock at the door startled them all; it was the signal to go on the stage for the first scene. There was a general outcry; no one was ready. They all hurried out, one after the other, raising a light cloud of dust, and giving a final touch to their coiffure and airy tarlatan skirts as they ran along. Carmela Minino was one of the first; taciturn and apathetic as she was, she was always ready—always at her post.

After the first movement, they rushed hastily back to the dressing-room to change, the accursed 'Excelsior' requiring six changes of costume for the entire *corps de ballet;* with the evening representation, this compelled them to dress and undress twelve times. They had danced badly, carelessly, anything being good enough for a matinée. But the ballet-master had scolded them roundly, brutally, as they came off the stage. They answered with loud complaints:

'What a dog's life!'

'Enough to kill one!'

'When will it be over? I should like to know!'

'For my part, I would rather sweep the streets than be a ballet-dancer!'

'Lucky the people who don't have to dance for a living!'

Carmela Minino was silent, but her poor heart

was oppressed by a vague, intense melancholy. She felt profoundly the absolute forlornness, the hopeless limitation, the absence of any possible amelioration in the condition of those who followed her profession. She was oppressed by its apparent gaiety and the real wretchedness it concealed; and she sighed heavily as she thought of the corruption in which propriety, virtue, honour, and modesty were almost inevitably destined to succumb; but she could see no other possible future. What would she ever be able to do but dance, in the third row, dressed as a Japanese, a fairy, or a page? What else did she know how to do? And even that she did not do well, but only barely well enough to earn her bread and keep a roof over her head.

All the other ballet-girls had dreams of making a brilliant marriage, or winning a fortune at the lottery, or of having a rich and generous lover; but Carmela Minino had no such dreams.

'Emilia Tromba is not here, either!' exclaimed the languid, fragile Margharita de Santis in an injured tone.

'She is at Sorrento, too, with Concetta Giura,' answered Carlotta Musto, who always knew all the news.

'With Ferdinando Terzi, of course!' murmured Marietta Sanges, the tall blonde, who hated her protector, a notary sixty years old.

Carmela's eyes blinked once or twice, as if

dazzled. Her hands trembled as she dressed for the telegraph scene.

'Of course!' exclaimed Checchina Cozzolino, who was as jealous as she was poor. 'He never leaves her. Emilia will spend all his fortune.'

'Because he chooses to spend it,' observed Carlotta Musto, who was a person of experience, and was listened to with respect. 'He does not love her,' she continued.

'He spends his very neck-bone!'

'I know it, but he does not care a straw for her. He loves a lady, a married lady, with a husband as jealous as a tiger.'

Carmela Minino sat down for a moment. She knew all this, had heard the same things said a hundred times, had listened greedily always, and always with an emotion which she could not define; but now they were said oftener.

'With that jealous husband Ferdinando Terzi may have terrible trouble some day,' said Carlotta Musto, as she arranged the telegraphist's cap on her head, and took the telegram in her hand.

'And Emilia Tromba will be abandoned!' shouted Checchina Cozzolino triumphantly.

'God be praised!' screamed two or three others.

Had not the call-boy knocked at the door? So Carmela thought, and she rose and went out into the corridor; she was suffocated, and felt like fainting in the great heat. No one had knocked; she was

mistaken. She breathed more easily in the corridor, alone, leaning against the wall, and clasping the imitation telegram to her bosom as if it had been a lover's letter. In another moment she was again on the stage dancing a furious galop, in which the *prima ballerina* led off. Carmela felt faint and ill; she danced badly, hit her head, and scratched her hand on a nail as she came off the stage.

Eight o'clock. The matinée was over, had been over for ten minutes, and the lights in the theatre were lowered. The machinists were at work on the stage preparing for 'Lohengrin'; the wings were full of workmen going through; dancers were hurrying out for an hour's rest—confusion reigned everywhere. Some of the dancers who remained sat in the wings exhausted with fatigue, and gazing up at the ceiling as if they expected Heaven knows what! and others were prosaically eating their supper. The two sisters Musto had had their supper sent from home—lasagne with a meat gravy made savoury with ricotta, sausages, and slices of pumpkin. They had arranged for themselves a corner of the dressing-table, and they ate tranquilly, with a healthy appetite, which was not in the least impaired by the neighbourhood of wash-bowls full of dirty water, combs, brushes, and pots of rouge and pomatum; they were kindly creatures, and had invited Checchina Cozzolino to dine with them; but though she had no dinner, and

no prospect of any, she was too anxious to conceal her horrible poverty to be willing to accept, and had refused curtly, saying that she was not hungry. Filomena Scoppa was the next one invited, but she had refused pleasantly, and had run to a little restaurant, whence she returned with two sous worth of bread and three of fried fish, which she devoured greedily, throwing the bones on the ground, regardless of decency.

Finally the sisters Musto had pressed Carmela to dine with them in the kindest manner, insisting that she must taste at least one lasagne—their mother was famous for this dish; but Carmela had refused with equal courtesy, declaring that she felt unable to eat anything that evening; that another time, perhaps she might, but now she really did not feel well enough. And in order to avoid further pressing she went out into the corridor and began to walk up and down. When she returned to the dressing-room the sisters had finished their lasagne and were eating great slices of the famous Neapolitan polpettone (meat pounded to a paste, mixed with bread-crumbs, hard-boiled eggs, pine-nuts and raisins). Carmela cautiously took her package of food from behind her hat, where it had been concealed, and went softly out; a mixture of pride and timidity made her unwilling to eat where she could be seen by the sisters Musto. She had refused their invitation because she knew that she never should be able to return their hospitality in

any way whatever; but she felt the need of food, and going to the darkest corner she could find, she began to eat her poor dinner. Various members of the chorus, porters, workmen and scene-shifters, passed by her, all looking at and speaking to her with a rough familiarity engendered by a common occupation, a common destiny, and each time she reddened and stopped eating, mastered by an unconquerable shyness. When she had finished eating everything the core of her apple remained; she did not know where to throw it, there were so many people about. Finally she went to the very back of the stage and, having rolled the apple-core in a newspaper, threw both into a dark corner. As she approached the wings again she met the errand-boy carrying a tray with a decanter and glasses. She stopped him and asked for a glass of water, handing him a penny, which the boy returned, saying gallantly:

'One does not pay for water.'

How slowly the hours crept by! At least, while the ballet was in progress, there was the excitement of dancing, the hurry of dressing and undressing; it was the waiting which was so wearisome, so absolutely intolerable! Those aimless, listless, useless, comfortless hours overwhelmed Carmela with a moral lassitude. Sometimes she had brought her crochet-work with her, for she, like most of the girls of the lower classes, had formed the project of making a crochet bed-quilt; but her companions had laughed

at her, and she had ended by leaving her work at home.

Formerly, also, when her mind had been more tranquil, she had been used to say the rosary; she would sit quietly in her corner with her hands in her pocket, letting the beads slip through her fingers while she repeated the *Gloria Patri*, the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria* with tireless devotion. Indeed, in those days she had frequently repeated the double rosary of fifteen decades, by which a soul is delivered from purgatory, always repeating fervently the glorious and the sorrowful mysteries at the beginning of every decade. Alas! now she could no longer do this. For some time past she had been restless and uneasy. She had lost the calm, the steadfast attention of former years, her prayers were dull and lifeless, her spirit cold and indifferent; in truth, profound bitterness had taken possession of her soul. She was twenty-four years old; and first as a scholar, afterwards as a ballet-dancer, had been twelve years in the theatre without the occurrence of a single pleasant incident. Within the last six years she had lost her mother, and her godmother and patroness, and though, curiously enough, the latter loss had been the greater of the two, the fact remained that she had lost everything she loved. Twenty-four years old! Twelve years of hard work without a sign of hope for the future! How she longed sometimes, with a real physical longing, to rest, to sleep as

much as she wished, to eat her meals comfortably and not in such a strangling hurry, to dress warmly and decently, to live, in fact, like a human being and not like a slave! She was a good girl, and regarded these rebellious thoughts as temptations of the devil; but they returned, they assailed her daily, caused partly by the fact that she really needed rest and better food, and partly by the sight of the luxuries indulged in by the best ballet-dancers, all of whom had lovers who were men of wealth and social distinction. How could Carmela say her rosary with devotion in that crowded theatre, close to the stage, which, as things were, was an evil market for youth and beauty? When she was younger, full of a faith which had never been disturbed, with a reverent fear of God, which was kept alive by her constant attendance at Mass, and by the influence of her confessor, Don Giovanni Parascandolo, a devout and austere priest, then, calm, if not happy in mind, she was able to say her rosary between the acts of 'Norma' or 'Faust,' and to say it devoutly without distraction; but now, when her hand touched the beads and she began to say the prayers, she found herself doing so mechanically, her restless thoughts wandering the while uneasily, wandering to such frivolities!—to the letters of Roberto Gargiulo which she kept and read, without caring much for the writer; to the silk petticoats belonging to Marietta Sanges and Carlotta Musto; to her own poor corset,

bought of Carsona for two francs seventy-five centimes, every bone in which was now broken, and which she could not therefore lace properly, though it made her waist perfectly enormous; and, finally, to the dinner being given at Sorrento to Concetta Giuro and Emilia Tromba by the Duke of Sanframondi and Count Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande. It would be a beautiful dinner she knew, gay with flowers and spread on a table overlooking the blue sea. The fare would be abundant and delicate, the wines of the best.

And then her thoughts wandered again, this time to Amina Boschetti, who had lived such a luxurious life, who by her lover's command had been embalmed like a queen, and now wore in her grave the wonderful necklace of seven rows of pearls which had been that lover's last gift to her, and had cost fifty thousand francs.

Her meditations were disturbed by the blare of the trumpets in 'Lohengrin.' It was already nine o'clock; the ballet would only begin at eleven. Carmela rose with a sigh, and advanced to the wings. She wore her best gown of dark blue cloth, with a cream-coloured lace scarf at her throat, fastened by a gold pin—two hearts united by a chain—which the Boschetti had given her when she was a little girl. Carefully kept and daily rubbed bright with an old glove, it was her greatest treasure, and typified to her simple mind the union between her and her

beloved godmother. Carmela was heavily rouged, but in spite of it she looked pale as she leaned against the wall wrapped in her white knitted shawl. Absorbed in her sad thoughts, she hardly heard the rolling chords which announced the arrival of the Swan, the miraculous Swan, who bore the Cavalier of the Holy Grail.

Suddenly she started at the sound of a loud laugh close by—a noisy, feminine laugh. The two missing ballet-dancers, Concetta and Emilia, had returned from Sorrento, and were ascending the stairs. They arrived with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, and told the stage-master with peals of laughter that they had been ill all day, frightfully ill with a dangerous illness; the physician had never left them. And they laughed and laughed again as they arranged the flowers they wore in their bosoms.

'Yes, yes, I know what sort of an illness you have had, dear girls!' roared the director. 'I will give you a remedy—a forfeit of five francs each. Take that for a healing plaster!'

'But we have got a terrible illness, the illness of *'ndi, 'ndo,*' wailed Concetta Giura.

'Five francs forfeit, my fine misses—five francs each!' screamed the director, furious at being mocked by them.

'I will give you five francs as a present,' returned Emilia Tromba, smelling her flowers.

The director shrugged his shoulders, and went off

in order to avoid saying anything more to the two insolent delinquents.

Concetta and Emilia burst into a loud, shrill, vulgar laugh. Concetta was really a beautiful creature, dazzlingly fair, with rich, copper-coloured hair and sparkling, steel-gray eyes. She was tall and graceful, and though slightly freckled, the freckles were not visible at night. Her hands and feet were not pretty, although she took great care of them; but it did not matter: she was so beautiful, so young, and fresh as a rose. She dressed almost always in black—in lace and jet in summer, in velvet and silk in winter, anxious to imitate the great ladies she saw walking in the streets or sitting in their boxes in the theatre. Especially did she wish to imitate the young Duchess of Sanframondi, the wife of her lover. The Duchess was young and beautiful, and an angel in virtue, and when Concetta was silent, her beautiful red lips pressed together, her large eyelids cast down, she really looked *comme il faut.* But if she opened her mouth, her harsh guttural voice with its coarse inflections, and her language—which was the Neapolitan dialect of the very lowest class, and often frankly obscene—dispelled all illusions. And yet it was said that it was this very brutality which had made Sanframondi fall in love with her. When his angelic wife had bored him to extinction with her virtue, her chastity, and the serene resignation of a Christian victim, he would go to Concetta and

implore her to talk to him in the filthy language of Basso Porto. She pretended to protest, pretended to be angry, but, knowing well that the secret of her power over him lay not merely in her beauty but in the vileness of her language, she always allowed herself to be persuaded, and as the hideous words fell from her lovely lips, Sanframondi would roar with laughter and kiss her passionately, forgetting his wife and children, his losses at play, and the debts which were eating away his fortune. Concetta this evening was looking particularly brilliant, dressed in the richest black satin, and wearing a magnificent *fermoir* of diamonds and sapphires, which Sanframondi had given her.

Emilia Tromba was very different, though she, too, was as fair as driven snow. But her magnificent waving hair was black as a raven's wing, her glorious almond-shaped eyes were black also, her mouth exquisite, her smile charming. Her nose was a high aquiline, and spoiled the perfect regularity of her face, but she was proud of it because it was aristocratic. Her mother was a vegetable seller in the market; very possibly her father might have been a noble. She was not tall, and was rather plump, but her arms and shoulders were marvellously beautiful, and when dancing she generally contrived to let her splendid hair fall upon her shoulders. At such moments she was incomparably lovely. She was now dressed in silver-gray velvet, trimmed with

chinchilla. She wore a black hat loaded with plumes, and blazed with diamonds, earrings, bracelets, pins, buckles, etc. In spite of all this splendour she contrived to look disorderly. She had upset champagne on the front of her gown, and had crushed a chocolate bonbon with her elbow. Thus attired, the beautiful, noisy, shameless mistress of the elegant Ferdinando Terzi approached poor Carmela, shivering in her thrice-washed woollen shawl.

'Are we very late, Minino?'

'They are finishing the first act of the opera, Donna Emilia,' replied Carmela, with lowered eyes.

'We have come too soon, Concetta!' screamed Emilia. 'We could have stayed away much longer!'

'Of course, what a shame! Shall we go away again?'

'But no. With whom? Where? Ferdinando and Luigi have gone away; they will only come back to take us when the opera is over. Did you come to the matinée, Minino?' asked Emilia.

'Yes, miss.'

'And why? Couldn't you take a holiday — a holiday with someone who cares for you?'

'I cannot take holidays; five francs forfeit would ruin me,' answered Carmela, who had become mortally pale in spite of her rouge.

'But someone who is fond of you—couldn't he pay the forfeit?'

'Someone who loves me, Donna Emilia? Who is there to love me?'

An accent of pain was audible in her voice.

'Eh, someone must be fond of you. Do you mean that you have no one?'

Carmela had little vanity, but she felt stung.

'Someone, perhaps,' she murmured. 'Yes, there is—someone.'

'Eh! Make up your mind, my child,' exclaimed the corruptress maternally. 'Do throw propriety overboard. What is the use of it? Why are you so good? For Jesus Christ? When the time comes you can confess and repent, and die in the odour of sanctity, as I mean to do. Are you good for what the world says of you? The world laughs at you for it, and if you don't decide now, when will you? You are not beautiful. There is no use in telling lies—you know it yourself; and if you don't take a lover now, you will never get one.'

In spite of all her efforts the large tears began to roll down Carmela's cheeks, her bosom heaved with sobs.

'Now what are you crying for? What has happened to you?' screamed Emilia.

'Nothing—nothing!' stammered Carmela, amid her sobs.

'Take this—take this to comfort you a little. Ferdinando Terzi, my lover, gave them to me to-day at Sorrento.' And, opening a bag of sweets,

Emilia poured a handful of chocolate fondants into Carmela's hand, saying: 'Eat—eat, and don't think of any troubles!'

Carmela went slowly toward the dressing-room, carefully carrying the bonbons. She did not eat them, and more than one tear fell upon them as she folded them carefully in a piece of newspaper.

The ballet was over at a quarter to one o'clock, and the coryphées dressed hastily. They were worn out with fatigue, and wrapped themselves up as warmly as they could, nodding a silent good-night to their companions, and flitting away without looking to right or left. Carmela descended the stairs slowly, half dead with weariness, with aching limbs, and a chill dread of the long, solitary walk from the theatre to the Pignasecca. When she reached the hall, she saw that Concetta Giura and Emilia Tromba were waiting in a corner for their lovers, who had not come for them, Sanframondi having first to accompany the Duchess, and Ferdinando Terzi the lady he loved, of whom Emilia was prudent enough never to speak. Both Concetta and Emilia looked rather tired, and Carmela stopped for a moment to speak to them and to Mastracchio, who was waiting for her father.

At this moment two carriages drove up, and two gentlemen, wrapped in long fur pelisses, descended from them and entered the theatre. They were Sanframondi and Terzi. The former looked fright-

fully bored; the latter preserved the air of glacial indifference which was habitual with him, and was due partly to his aristocratic and finely-chiselled features, and partly to the blue, cold eyes and the beautiful mouth which never smiled. As soon as the gentlemen appeared, Concetta and Emilia overwhelmed them with reproaches for having kept them waiting.

'Let us go at once, then,' said Sanframondi impatiently, twisting his face to keep his glass in his eye.

The couple drove away at once, after making an appointment for the last day of carnival.

The others lingered. Emilia was looking into her bag to see if she had all her jewels, and Ferdinando Terzi, impassible, smoked a cigarette.

'Minino, did you see whether I wore my diamond clover-leaves this evening?' screamed Emilia.

'No, Donna Emilia, you did not,' replied Carmela, advancing.

'Ah, thanks! You have taken a load off my mind. This is Carmela Minino, one of my companions, Ferdinando.'

The Count of Torregrande scarcely deigned to glance at the poor coryphée who stood trembling before him, a prey to a strange, indefinable anguish.

'Listen, Ferdinando;' and Emilia whispered something in his ear, laughing loudly the while.

Carmela heard perfectly the words: 'Only think! she is a modest maid.'

And Ferdinando Terzi, looking at her with his contemptuous, cutting, icy glance, had replied scornfully: 'What a fool!'

Carmela felt the earth sinking under her feet. Emilia took Terzi's arm (for she affected a great familiarity with him in public) and approached the carriage. Terzi courteously opened the door for her, helped her in, and entered himself. The door of the coupé closed softly, the equipage rolled away, and the measured trot of the thorough-bred horse grew fainter in the distance. A mist gathered over Carmela's eyes as she stood on the steps looking out into the black night, but seeing nothing.

'Donna Carmela! Donna Carmela!' said a masculine voice.

It was Roberto Gargiulo, who had waited for her at the door of San Carlo, a door famous in the history of Neapolitan gallantry.

'What do you want? What is it, Don Roberto?' she stammered, breathless, weak, oppressed by a strange, nameless pain.

'I wanted an answer. Why didn't you answer?'

'What should I answer? Good-night, Don Roberto,' said Carmela in a choked voice, trying to tear herself away.

'No—no! at least let me take you home; it is so late, and you are alone. I haven't the courage to let you go alone at this hour,' answered Roberto Gargiulo, who seemed, and was, much moved.

'It isn't right—really it isn't right!' answered Carmela, with a last effort of resistance.

'You are so tired! We'll take a carriage. Come, Donna Carmela—come! you will soon reach home in a carriage. I will leave you at the door.'

'Let us go, then,' said Carmela, suddenly decided.

III

'I WILL take you to supper somewhere this evening,' said Roberto Gargiulo, when they had reached Piazza San Ferdinando.

Carmela stopped short for a moment, greatly annoyed. In point of fact, she detested these late suppers, coming after the fatigue of the ballet, and taken always in some restaurant frequented by other couples of more than equivocal respectability. Indeed, the more Roberto Gargiulo made public their relation to each other, the more she suffered in the depths of her heart from a sense of vague mortification, a ceaseless dumb pain. Outwardly she was calm and smiling, but inwardly she suffered from a thousand nameless stabs.

'Where would you like to go?' she said, without showing the reluctance she felt.

'Alla Regina d'Italia,' answered Roberto, as they walked along the Corso Toledo.

'We won't stay long, will we?' she returned in an affectionate tone.

'Why? Are you sleepy?'

'For your sake, too. Don't you have to go early to the shop to-morrow?'

'Don't you remember that to-morrow is Sunday, Lina?'

'Ah, yes! you are right.'

And she sighed. She would have liked to go to dine with Roberto at some little country inn near Posilippo, from which she could see the blue sea, of which she got a glimpse but rarely, living as she did in the very heart of Naples, and only going out to rehearsals and to the theatre on ballet nights. At these places in the country no one knew Gargiulo or herself; there were no curious, no insolent glances to dread. But after this late supper there was no hope of a country outing on Sunday. Gargiulo was not sentimental, and he was, above all, desirous to display himself at semi-fashionable restaurants with his mistress, in fine company, or what he called fine company. He had very little money to spend, and Carmela regretted even what he spent. It was a good deal for him, and to her it seemed something enormous.

'Are you hungry?' said Roberto kindly.

'Yes, yes—rather,' she answered, anxious not to appear ungrateful.

'We will have a splendid roast of *mozzarelle*, Lina, at the Regina d'Italia. They cook *mozzarelle* to perfection,' he continued, in the serious tone with which the Neapolitan always speaks of culinary things.

'Yes, it is true. Will they have *mozzarelle* this evening?'

'They always do; it is a speciality. Last evening, when I left you, I went there a moment to see who was there, and Don Gabriele Scagnamiglia had just ordered a second dish of *mozzarelle*.'

'Oh! he was there, was he?'

'Certainly. With an actress—a Frenchwoman. He is a regular old sinner!'

'He is rich, and a bachelor, so——' she said, in an indulgent tone.

'He has always courted you a little, eh?' said Roberto, laughing.

'Oh,' she answered, blushing through her rouge, 'as he does everyone.'

'But you didn't yield, like the others?'

'No, no,' she answered quickly. 'I swear it to you,' she added, looking at him humbly.

'It isn't necessary to swear. I believe you. I know you are a good girl. If it were not so, I shouldn't care for you,' he concluded thoughtfully.

She looked up at the sky as they walked on silently towards the restaurant. It was a starry April night and very mild, a good many people were walking in the streets. San Carlo had been open unusually late that spring, and would be open but for a very few days more. Carmela Minino would soon have her vacation, a vacation which she at once desired and dreaded, for though repose was pleasant, it meant the cessation of her salary of three francs and a half a day. There was some talk of a summer ballet in

June, July, and August at the Varietà, but she had as yet had no engagement.

'It is hot to-night,' said Roberto, as they entered the restaurant.

'Very hot,' she replied.

Their conversation, even in the tenderest moments, was not more interesting than this. Roberto Gargiulo had a certain amount of gaiety, a certain imitation of wit, but he only showed it among his boon companions at the café or in the theatre, or some place of nightly revel. With Carmela Minino he showed—in spite of himself—what he really was, a placid bourgeois, rather slow of intellect, all the more because the girl herself was quiet and sensible, and incapable of making an indecent speech. This at once pleased and annoyed Gargiulo; privately he rejoiced that Carmela was so simple and good a creature, but these very qualities rendered it impossible for him to show off his mistress in public, and in public he would have liked to see her bold, and free and easy. He was extremely proud of having been her first lover, but he would fain have taught her the manner adopted by ballet-girls in public when they accompanied their lovers to any place of amusement. Instead of this, the presence of any third person reduced Carmela to silence; she could only smile very sweetly and courteously. Fortunately, she had a pretty smile.

The restaurant or *trattoria* of the Regina d'Italia

is high up in the Corso Toledo, where it occupies the whole of a rather lofty first floor, but the door is a small one in the Vicolo Speranzella. It is a *trattoria* almost of the third order, much frequented by students, clerks, and commercial travellers. Breakfast—that is, lunch—costs a franc and a half, and dinner two francs; but for that price one can dine abundantly and relatively well, the above-mentioned class of gentlemen being fond of their food, and keen about having it of the best quality possible for the price. The Regina d'Italia therefore holds its own successfully, while other restaurants of the same class fail altogether. Part of this success is owing to the fact, not common in Naples, that it is kept open far into the night, and thus is a rendezvous for gamblers, reporters, police agents, detectives, and all the other birds of night who are able to put on evening dress and white gloves, and feign a certain imitation of high life. Sometimes, very late, a gentleman may be seen there with an elegantly-dressed companion, perhaps with the desire to do something out of the way, perhaps because no other restaurant is open so late.

Carmela and Roberto went up the marble staircase with its strip of warm *cocco* in the middle. It was passably clean, but only passably. As they entered the room above a tall man accosted them :

'Oysters! oysters! Fresh oysters!'

'Would you like a dozen oysters, Lina?' said

Roberto magnificently, with the air of a rich *viveur*.

'No, no,' she answered quickly, passing on at once.

In the entrance-room, which also opened into the kitchen, the victuals were exposed to view on a long marble counter—cutlets, fowls trussed ready for roasting, various kinds of fish, a large ham, sausages, *mozzarelle*, and a large Roman tart glistening with sugar, and dripping with vanilla cream. All this formed a very appetizing display, but Carmela passed on quickly with lowered eyes.

'Did you see, Linuccia? There were certain big *triglia*—real loves! We will order them cooked with tomato-sauce, eh?'

'They will be dear,' she ventured to say.

'That does not matter to you,' he answered instantly, and a little contemptuously. 'This evening we will have a feast.'

They passed on quickly through the various rooms, all alike ornamented with white stucco, and furnished with narrow divans of red reps placed against the wall behind the tables. Gargiulo looked about to see if any acquaintances were there to admire him. He was, for an eye unaccustomed to a near view of the real thing, a fair imitation of a gentleman, with his white waistcoat, gold watchchain, and the silver chain which held his keys and pencil hanging at his side. Several of the rooms were empty, but in the

last but one was Rosine Musto with her protector. She nodded affectionately to Carmela as she passed.

'She is always with Sambrini,' murmured Gargiulo.

'They say—they say that they have been married in church,' answered Carmela.

'Oh!' he answered, in the coldest tone.

They were now in the last room, which has two balconies on Toledo. Roberto looked about for a table, and decided upon one in the corner, between the window and the balcony. While they prepared to sit down, Carmela took off her jacket, and appeared in a gown of lilac cashmere, with lilac velvet at the throat and wrists, a gift from Gargiulo —cashmere, trimming and lining all complete, she having only paid for the making, as she never accepted a penny from him. The twelve francs lay heavily upon her conscience, but she had said nothing, he was so kind and generous.

'Why haven't you put on your new hat?' he said, examining her attentively.

'One spoils everything in that theatre,' she replied vaguely.

'Here we are not in the theatre,' observed her lover.

'I didn't know—didn't know we were coming here.'

She was very much changed in appearance. Formerly she had carefully rubbed off rouge and cold cream before leaving the theatre; now she made

up her face carefully, because Roberto wished it, her eyes were outlined with kohl, and her lips touched with carmine. He took a perverse pleasure in making her paint and enamel her face, and brought her himself all the cosmetics and unguents and powders used for the purpose. She had a pair of wearable gloves, a gold chain with a cross round her neck, and a pair of earrings of false brilliants—a very good imitation—in her ears. Roberto had given her everything, from the gloves to the earrings. The things were all imitations; the gloves, much shop-worn, cost a franc and a half, the gilt chain and cross from five to six, the earrings fifteen, but he was as proud of this as if he had accompanied a woman loaded with diamonds. And now, as she sat under the flaring gaslight, Carmela had quite a new aspect: strangely embellished, a good deal made up, only her superb hair and large dark eyes unchanged, as was her gentle smile. Her hands, in spite of glycerine, were thin and brown, and bore traces of the work they had done for years. Roberto had entreated her never to take her gloves off, especially as he had not been able to give her any rings.

They had hardly sat down before another couple entered—a young man who was by birth a member of the aristocracy of Naples, but who had utterly gone to the devil, having devoured his fortune with cards and women, and who had received the final blow at

the hands of a certain Lodoiska, a Russian singer born in Genoa. Now he lived with Lodoiska, at her expense; it was said that he intended to marry her. His distant relations—he had no near ones—moved heaven and earth in order to get him out of Naples, he had fallen so low, and they were so thoroughly ashamed of him. He was a small, slight, well-made fellow, with a handsome regular face, Arab in contour, and with jet-black eyes and hair and moustache. Lodoiska was tall and graceful, fair and blond, with large blue eyes, one of which unfortunately looked in the wrong direction. She was dressed in crimson, with a white hat loaded with white plumes on her head, and magnificent diamond earrings in her ears—earrings which must have cost at least three thousand francs. Massamormile bowed to Roberto, and Roberto blushed with pleasure; he was so vain of a bow from a noble, even a noble as lost and degraded as Placido Massamormile.

Carmela and Roberto ate in silence. Lodoiska scolded Placido in a loud harsh voice. She put up with him, partly from habit, partly because she had no one else in view, partly, perhaps, because she was still fond of him; but they quarrelled continually, irritated by their position towards each other, but not able to free themselves. Placido despised everything, beginning with himself, and Lodoiska enjoyed everything in a conscienceless, vulgar fashion. It was quite evident that he suffered,

though his handsome Arab mask of a face was expressionless; still, it was clear that these scenes pained him, and equally clear that the noisy Lodoiska enjoyed life in her loud way. Roberto Gargiulo envied Placido. What was that quiet, silent sheep of a Carmela Minino compared to the brilliant café-singer, who possessed a fortune of three hundred thousand francs, which she had not earned on the stage, and who perhaps would succeed in marrying a noble? The poorness, the insignificance of his conquest humiliated Roberto Gargiulo every now and then, and at such moments his glances at Carmela were indifferent, and even a little bitter. Did she understand this? Perhaps. Ever since Lodoiska's entrance she had sat with bowed head, looking steadfastly at her plate, and mechanically rolling pellets of bread, and had thereby succeeded in violently irritating her lover, who would have liked to see her gay, sparkling, and daring.

'What is the matter? What has happened to you?' he said, in a hard voice.

'Nothing—nothing,' she answered, looking up, startled.

'You are a funereal guest,' he answered rudely, still more annoyed to see that her eyes were full of tears. 'It would have been better if I had taken you straight home.'

'I—I did not want to come,' she stammered, strangling a sob.

'I'll think better of it before I ask you another time,' he answered dryly, beginning to divide the *triglia*.

They were silent; Carmela blinked away her tears, composed herself, and pretended to eat. Several people entered, among others, Carlo Altamura, a money-lender, who would lend money for a few days or a few hours, and who usually haunted gambling-houses, where he had already ruined more than one unfortunate player. With him came Gaetano d'Amara, a huge, fat reporter, who was obliged to sit up all night, and who had come in to supper between one report and another. They were followed by Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio, the rich, popular, and gallant druggist of the Via Pignasecca. He, for a wonder, came alone. It was not often that Don Gabriele took supper alone. With his well-trimmed, carefully-perfumed white beard, his red cheeks, mischievous glances, and elegant attire, all complete, from the flower in his buttonhole to the handsome cane he carried in his hand, Don Gabriele was still a handsome man, despite the fact that he had long passed fifty-five years, and he enjoyed an immense and incontestable popularity with women of all ages—actresses, ballet-dancers, singers, whoever, in short, was of doubtful reputation. As soon as he entered he nodded affectionately to Roberto and Carmela, with an air of extreme benignity, as if he were bestowing a benediction. And when, a moment

later, Gaetano d'Amara called Roberto to go out on the balcony in order to speak a word to him apart, Don Gabriele came and sat down by Carmela.

'Oh, Donna Carmelina, you are growing more and more beautiful!' he said in a low voice, with a smile.

'Your eyes are beautiful,' replied Carmela, giving the usual Neapolitan reply to a compliment.

'Oh, I am old—old, Donna Carmelina. No one wants to have anything to do with me.'

'Don't say that—it is not true, cavaliere.'

'And have you smiled on me? Have you not always said no? And instead, like everyone else, you have preferred a young man.'

He kept an eye on the balcony while he talked on in a low voice, with a pleasant smile. She looked at him, reddening and growing pale by turns, because she was rather shy of this rich, generous, elegant old man, who had had, she knew, endless adventures.

'What do you find in that young man? Do you love him? Are you really in love?—much, very much in love?' said Don Gabriele, growing more and more aggressive.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, much agitated.

'He gives you a good deal of money, perhaps? And who knows where he gets it?'

'Not money—no money—never money!' she answered quickly, with a note of anger and pride in her voice.

'Don't be offended. Pardon me, Donna Carme-

lina. Then he makes you die of hunger? Or it is for love of his beautiful eyes? Some miserable little present he gives every now and then? I understand it all, and I know that you have to spend your own money, too.'

She trembled with mortification, because all that Don Gabriele said was cruel, but absolutely true—because it seemed a crime not to defend Roberto, and brutal to allow this gay, unrepentant old sinner to speak as he did. Everything was so true and so painful that she leant back in her chair, feeling faint and ill.

'Don't be so unhappy, Donna Carmelina. I don't like to see you so sad,' added the druggist. 'But I speak to you like the true friend I am, because I have known you from childhood, and know you to be a good girl——'

She shot an imploring glance at him. Don Gabriele feigned not to see it, and proceeded:

'I tell you plainly: some day Roberto Gargiulo will leave you. Perhaps the day is not far distant.'

'Perhaps the day is not far distant,' she repeated mechanically, as if the phrase expressed her own intimate conviction.

'And what will you do then? Who will you find? Upon whom will you call, Donna Carmela?'

'Who shall I call? Who can I find?' she answered vaguely.

'You will find your old friend Gabriele, who is not

twenty-eight years old, with an imperial and curling moustaches, but who is a reliable person, Donna Carmelina. Call Don Gabriele, and Don Gabriele will answer, with a military salute, "Present!" '

And he rounded off his discourse with a gay laugh, because Roberto Gargiulo was approaching. And seeing that Carmela was flushed and evidently agitated, Don Gabriele launched forth into conversation with many smiles.

'Dear, dear Gargiulo, as you were rude enough to leave this lovely lady alone, I, like a faithful cavalier, have kept her company.'

'And you have been making love to her?' said Roberto gaily, beginning his supper.

'Certainly; I always make love to her—this evening more than ever.'

'And with what result, cavaliere?'

'I confess, to my shame, with no result at all,' said the old sinner, giggling.

'You mortify me, cavaliere,' murmured Carmela, who was now calm again, but still embarrassed.

'Take good care of this little woman, Gargiulo; she loves you; she adores you; she is a monster of fidelity. I am an old rascal, but she is an angel!'

Notwithstanding the slight tone of irony in these words, and their manifest exaggeration, Roberto Gargiulo was pleased. When Don Gabriele had gone to another table, quite satisfied at having said

to Carmela what he wished and intended to say, Roberto stretched out his hand and patted hers.

'I beg your pardon if I was rude just now.'

'It doesn't matter—it doesn't matter!' she said, again much moved.

When she climbed the stairs to her fourth floor that night, Carmela panted with fatigue and nervousness. When he left her at the street-door, Gargiulo had asked her, as he always did, to let him come up with her for half an hour. And she had refused, obstinately, as she always did. She would not allow him to visit her at her lodgings. Since she had given herself to him, and everyone, alas! had known it, she had been ashamed to look her neighbours in the face. She blushed as she passed them, from the fruit-seller, a cross creature, who now frowned when she saw Carmela, and murmured insulting words, to the coal-seller, who shook her head mournfully at her and sighed, while Don Santo, the baker, groaned, 'What are we—what are we, poor creatures?' as he cut off her portion of bread. As for the young wine-seller, he no longer bowed to her, and even Gaetanella the hairdresser, who now dressed her hair every day, came with pursed-up lips and a distant, prudent manner, while she made cautious allusions to the young men who ruined themselves in theatres and music-halls. Finally, the porter looked at her insolently and meaningly every time she went out at unusual hours.

No! never would she receive Gargiulo in the house where she lived. She felt ashamed in the presence of the inanimate objects in her room—the Madonna suspended at the head of her bed, the relics of Sant' Antonio, of everything which reminded her of the time when she was pure and chaste. She never spoke of this to Roberto, for fear of being laughed at, but she was obstinate in her resolve of not receiving him in the house. She kept her room clean, but she knew that he would despise its poverty; she blushed at the very idea of his seeing it. That evening, too, Roberto had been persistent; he was tired of going to meet her at a third-class hotel in another quarter of the town; tired, too, of paying for such meetings—for the poorest hotels are more or less expensive—while if she had received him in the house where she lived an occasional gift of fifty centimes to the porter would have arranged everything. But she had refused obstinately, with the donkey-like obstinacy of the timid. Then he had offered to engage a furnished room for her in another quarter of the town. This also she refused, and, indeed, it would have been very awkward for him had she consented, as he could not have paid the rent. Forty or fifty francs a month, a charwoman to pay, the porter, a thousand other small expenses! No, indeed; he would have been sorely upset had his offer been accepted, because the bond between Carmela and

himself would have been stronger than ever had she entered upon a new mode of life in order to please him. In fact, he had only made the proposition from a desire to show off, and was enchanted not to be taken at his word. She had refused, prompted by the sentiment of economy which was the result of her poverty, and also by the horror of change peculiar to all simple creatures who love their poor houses and poor, humble ways. Nevertheless, Gargiulo had gone away angry. He was convinced that Carmela adored him, and, knowing her to be obedient to his lightest wish, certain (as he thought) that she was under the fascination of his love and generosity, was he not always making her little presents?—he was indignant that she dared to rebel.

'So you are ashamed of what you have done? Then why did you do it?' he said sharply.

'Because—because——' she answered, shaking her head mysteriously.

Arrived at last at her own door, and having opened it, she sank into the first chair she found, and buried her face in her hands. She knew that Roberto Gargiulo would have forgotten their quarrel when he woke the next morning. But, alone in the darkness, she felt so lost, wretched, and despairing that she exclaimed aloud, as if addressing a third person:

'But what is the matter with me? What has happened to me?'

Ah! thinking over the past, alone in the deep silence and darkness of the night, she saw plainly what had happened to her. She had committed her first error, and that the great one, which no woman is ever able to repair, which God alone can pardon; and she had committed it, influenced neither by passion, nor by love, nor by vanity, nor by interest, but solely because she was a weak creature, without force of will, incapable of resistance, incapable of initiative. She had offended God and the Madonna; she had wounded the soul of her dear mother, who was now perhaps in purgatory; she was lost in the opinion of all honest people; she could no longer go to Confession and Communion unless she repented, and abandoned her present way of life. She was bound—or felt herself to be so—to Roberto Gargiulo by gratitude for his regard for her, for his kindness, for his gifts, and she would willingly have made any sacrifice to show him that she was grateful, but she knew that she did not love, and had never loved him.

'Why did I do it, then? Why did I do it?'

And as the night deepened and the cold chilled her to the bone, she repeated the question which she had asked herself in the winter nights as she lay shivering under her threadbare coverlets, the question so often asked by Roberto when they quarrelled, and no response came from the inmost recesses of her soul, where, nevertheless, something profound moved

and lived. And as she had repented her sin as soon as she had committed it, so she repented again, and bitterly, as the dreary night crept on, and as she lived over again the humiliation of that supper, Roberto's reproaches and the terrible advice given by Don Gabriele—advice which revealed clearly enough the depth of her error, and the sad future which awaited her.

Perhaps Roberto Gargiulo was really in love with her? No. Was not she plain in spite of her youth, and her beautiful dark hair and eyes? And was not Gargiulo a handsome youth, who had had other mistresses—so he said—a hundred thousand times better-looking than she was? What could he find in her? He forced her to rouge, to blacken her eyes, to paint her lips, to load herself with false jewels, to rub her hands with *pâte d'amandes*, just because he found her rustic, common, ugly, servile. Did Gargiulo love her? But no—but no! She was not the kind of woman men love, the good fortune of inspiring a deep, sincere affection, a great passion, was not reserved for her, but for the prima donnas of the ballet, who were always fair and fresh, and elegantly dressed with shining tights of finest rose-coloured silk and crisp tulle petticoats, with white hands laden with jewels. She was only a poor dancer in the third row, with barely rags to cover her. Gargiulo in love with her? Never!

'Why have I done this, then? Why—why?'

She repented bitterly. The physical joys of love had never appealed to her temperament, which was naturally and essentially chaste; she submitted, but did so with difficulty, and sometimes with invincible repugnance. She was sentimental, with the mild sentimentality of the south; she would have liked Gargiulo to write her long letters, to copy poetry for her, to give her flowers, to be gentle, respectful, perhaps a little distant, and he, having taken a ballet-girl for his mistress, thought all this regard and attention the proper thing for a *fiancée*, for respectable young women in general, but absurd and out of place where Carmela was concerned, and he was superior, cynical, and slightly contemptuous with her. He made her presents: a quantity of things which she had never had, and of which she had felt the want, and he bestowed them with the benign and gracious air of a generous person. She now had handkerchiefs of false batiste, stockings of half silk, an under-petticoat of surah, bought second-hand, several false jewels, and he had given her the lilac gown for Easter, and promised a silk one—black and white stripes—for the summer. He spent money for little suppers after the ballet, for little lunches, for carriages; she had cost him perhaps three or four hundred francs already in the two months they had been together. But was not Carmela herself forced to spend a great deal of money because of her relation with Roberto? She no longer cooked her

own food, because he said that it ruined her hands. She had now a charwoman to whom she paid eight francs a month. Had she not been obliged to buy a pair of low shoes, a new corset, a jacket which a tailor had made for her, and which she had paid for at the rate of two francs a week?

On the fifteenth of May, which was Roberto's birthday, she would be forced to spend at least thirty francs on a silver cigar-case, he was so fond of chic. Her finances were terribly out of order. Usually in the winter season she saved some money, and this, with what she earned for summer engagements, helped her to live. But now, in two months she had not been able to put aside a single penny. She had spent everything in order to cut a figure with Roberto, and she had some debts which made her tremble with fear and worry. All her habits were changed: she did not sleep enough, she ate food which disagreed with her at unaccustomed hours, she was always in a tremendous hurry and distressed by being so. She no longer went, when she had a free afternoon, to vespers in the parish church of the Pellegrini; she had changed the church of Santo Spirito, in which she had been in the habit of hearing Mass, for the Madonna delle Grazie, where no one knew her. She no longer wore the scapulary of the Virgine del Carmine, her patroness, invoked in all moments of pain and trouble; she had laid aside the cord of the Third Order of St. Francis, because

she felt unworthy to wear it. She lived in a state of sin. On Easter Day she would not be able to receive the Holy Communion. God is merciful, God pardons, but to be forgiven one must not live in sin—and she was living in sin.

'Why have I done it, then? Why—why?'

When she thought of the future she trembled with fright and disgust. How long would her relation with Gargiulo last? She knew perfectly that he was not bound to her by love of any kind. He was vain of having seduced a girl who had before been perfectly honest, and he liked to go to the theatre in the evening and salute her with considerable ostentation when the figure of the ballet brought her near the footlights. He was amiable, but not tender; gallant, but not affectionate; sufficiently generous, but in a way which served himself, making gifts which showed off and enabled him to cut a fine figure as an open-handed person; but he never gave Carmela anything really comfortable or useful, as a real lover might have done. In fact, Roberto Gargiulo had moods which of late had made Carmela very anxious, though she was too timid to ask what ailed him when he was gloomy and troubled. Very often he was thoughtful and preoccupied; at other times he inveighed furiously against his destiny, the poverty of his condition, when he was born with 'princely instincts' and refined tastes. He spoke of rich people in general, and especially of his principal,

who was already a millionaire, with spite and hatred. Often, too, he mentioned the sums of money which, as cashier, passed through his hands, in a strange tone which frightened Carmela, as much as did the silence which followed. She knew that in the English shop they were both kind and considerate, treating their clerks well, paying them regularly and largely, giving invariably extra pay for extra work, and handsome presents when affairs were in a brilliant condition, but she also knew that in return for all this they required intelligence, zeal, energy, integrity, correct behaviour, and good habits. Roberto had never told her what was really the fact, that he had more than once been severely called to account by his superiors, but Carmela had divined it from some phrases he let fall at hazard. When reprimanded Roberto always promised to change his mode of life, and for two or three months he did so, in appearance, at least, and in the sense that he went rarely to the theatre, or to restaurants and cafés at a late hour, and that he never showed himself in public in the company of light women; but for the last three months he had been seen everywhere in Carmela's company, giving himself the air, as far as he could, of a fast man of the world, and setting at naught the rules of the English shop and its rigid principal. Yet he was often silent and preoccupied. Perhaps he spent too much? He had saved some money, but he must have spent it

all. And what was he spending now? On certain days he was absolutely miserly: he would not take a carriage even for half a course; he would not enter a café with Carmela, but would offer her a glass of syrup and water, price one penny. Perhaps he was already in debt? And as she thought of all these things, which she noticed every day, as she realized that her error weighed as heavily upon Gargiulo's life as upon her own, she asked herself with distress and fright:

'Why have I done it? Why—why?'

And the reason of her fall, the intimate cause, was profoundly secret; hidden away in the darkest recesses of her soul, she could never admit it to herself any more than she would have done so to others.

One day, not long after this, Carmela left the Variety, where she had been going through a long and tedious rehearsal, at five o'clock in the afternoon, and, a little dazzled by the glaring sunlight in the street, stood confusedly looking about her, and waiting for Gargiulo, who had promised to come for her, if he could leave the shop for an hour. But he was nowhere to be seen.

'He hasn't been able to get away,' she murmured to herself, as she turned into Via Pace, and began to climb the hill which led to her quarter of the town. The way was long, but she was light-footed, and walked on quickly, holding up daintily the striped white and black silk gown which Gargiulo

had given her, and which he insisted on her wearing whenever she was likely to be seen with him. When she reached Piazza Martiri a messenger-boy accosted her. 'Gutteridge' was stamped in gold letters on his hat-band, and she recognised him as a boy who had frequently brought her notes from Roberto. He touched his hat, and handed her a letter, saying:

'This letter is for you, miss. There is no answer.'

Before she had time to open the letter he had disappeared. She stopped in the gardens of the Villa Nunziati, and just under the shadow of the great gates, which were draped in blooming wisteria, she read:

'My dear Carmela,

'I have not the courage to come and say to you what I am writing. It would distress me too much to see you suffer. I am forced to leave Naples for a time. Some enemies of mine have spoken about our relation to each other to Signor Gutteridge, and he has reproved me severely. I had to answer that you and I had parted. If I had not done so he would have dismissed me. Poor Carmela! you will cry when you read this letter, but just think: could I endure to be dismissed when I have been twelve years in the shop? You would not have wished that, would you? As they did not believe my assertions and promises (because I have promised before now, and have failed to keep my promises), I was forced

to ask myself to be sent to Sarno for four or five months. I shall be in the silk factory there; the proprietors are partners of my superior, Mr. Gutteridge, and I am to do penance with them for my beloved sins. Sarno is very near Ñaples; but I shall be a prisoner there until I can recover the esteem of Mr. Gutteridge. Don't cry, Carmela! We have passed some happy hours together. I shall never forget, nor you either, I am sure. I shall always think of you with affection, for you are a good girl, and deserve it. Unfortunately this is a wicked world, and I could neither marry you nor continue to live with you without ruining myself. Think of me in future as a friend, who will always be glad to serve you when he can, in memory of our past affection. I send you a sad farewell kiss.

'Remember me kindly,

'ROBERTO GARGIULO.'

She did not cry. She was in a wide, fashionable street, crowded with people elegantly dressed, and she had sufficient self-command to walk on quietly, crushing the open letter in her hand. When she reached Chiaia, and began to climb the steps on the right of the street, she read the letter over again attentively. The phrases—vain and vague words of a false regret—which Roberto Gargiulo had copied probably from some romance, did not conceal the cold cynicism of the man, who, having amused him-

self, threw aside the toy which had served his pleasure as soon as it had become wearisome. Once, at the beginning of their acquaintance, all the pretty things Roberto Gargiulo had written to her when he wished to persuade her to love him had pleased her little sentimental soul, but little by little she had learned to know the emptiness of those phrases and the hard, dry nature of the man; and this last letter so fully displayed the cynical coldness of a temperament given entirely to the sensual pleasures of life that it completed the portrait of the man to whom she had sacrificed her virtue. Ungrateful! Yes, he was ungrateful; there was not a syllable in the letter which breathed of real affection and appreciation.

As she turned mechanically into Toledo, and passed through it to gain the Vicolo Paradiso and the poor room—which she wished to God she had never left—she felt a tide of bitterness sweep over her soul. But she was not desperate, and her almost slavish sense of the humility of woman's place in the economy of the universe prevented her from hating Roberto Gargiulo for the net he had spread for her, the lie of his pretended affection, the brutality with which he had ruptured their relation; she felt for him neither anger nor hatred. He had played his game, as all men play it, to see whether he could succeed; it is a game in which women must try not to lose! The whole secret of the relation between the sexes lies in this. There is a popular

Neapolitan saying, daily repeated to defenceless young girls, to young women, and young wives exposed to temptation—a saying alike wise and true —'*Man is a hunter.*'

She ought never to have yielded to Gargiulo. Now, what right had she to claim anything from him? When she had yielded she had imposed no conditions, and he had made no promises. Marriage had not been mentioned, nor a life in common, nor eternal love, nor even a relation which should last for years. What right had she, poor unfortunate one, to be angry, and complain? The source of her misfortune was in herself. If she had not yielded—— But she had done so, and now had no right to claim redress from him. The reasons of her fall were manifold, and were to be found in her weakness, her isolation, her surroundings, the recollection of her godmother Amina Boschetti, and of her own mother, who had never been married. Roberto Gargiulo, therefore, had only done what might reasonably have been expected. She was neither angry nor despairing, nor did she suffer the agony of disappointed love; but she was mortally sad, with the bitterness of one who has drunk molten metal. No tears fell from her dry eyes, and she walked on steadily and composedly, though she was as pale as death. To-morrow, or the next day, or the next day after that, she would have to endure the sneers and mocking pity of her companions of the *corps de ballet.*

As soon as one of them is abandoned by her lover all her little world knows it, and remarks it cruelly, because the other ballet-girls either have been abandoned in like manner or are sure to be.

As she entered the Via Pignasecca she was much more agitated than when she had read Gargiulo's cruel letter. It was humiliating to go home, to pass all the people who had known her from childhood. Involuntarily she cowered and blushed, for she had little pride. In the piazza, in the doorway of his spacious and elegant pharmacy, stood Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio, looking at the passers-by, while one of his subordinates watered and swept the pavement in front of him. The cavaliere always remained from five to eight in his pharmacy. He was jealous of his interests, and looked after them carefully—in fact, he well knew how to divide the hours of amusement from those of labour.

'Oh, my pretty Donna Carmelina!' he exclaimed gaily. 'Whence come you, my pretty lady?'

'From the rehearsal, cavaliere,' she replied, stopping politely.

'And we shall soon see "Rolla" at the Variety?'

'Next Saturday—three days from now.'

'I will come to applaud you, my little dear, and I will send you some flowers. You are in the first row at the Variety?'

'Yes, I am leader of the first row,' she murmured, with downcast eyes.

'By Jove! that is advancement!'

'They are summer theatres, cavaliere; all the Variety theatres are summer theatres. There are no prima donnas——'

'No, don't say that. I will come to applaud you, and send you flowers. Gargiulo won't object, will he?'

'No,' she answered, after a moment of hesitation.

He looked at her more closely, surveyed her with the shrewd, keen eyes of a man who knows everything, who can divine everything from a pause, from the inflection of a voice.

'What is the matter, Donna Carmelina? Are you ill?'

'No, thank you. I am perfectly well, cavaliere.'

'Roberto Gargiulo has abandoned you,' he said brusquely.

'How do you know?' stammered the poor thing, looking at him with frightened eyes.

'As if he himself had told me, Carmelina. It could not be otherwise.'

'True,' she whispered in a choked voice.

'Don't be too miserable, my dear girl. Too many tears spoil a woman's looks and her digestion.'

'I have not been crying, cavaliere.'

He looked keenly at her, and said suddenly:

'Then you did not love him?'

'No, cavaliere,' she answered, turning away.

'Nor he, either? He was not in love with you?'

'He? Not in the least!' she replied.

'And, then . . . Why? . . . Why?'

'Why? . . . And who knows why? No one knows why! Good-day, cavaliere.'

'You are going away? Stop! Do you remember what I said to you at the Regina d'Italia? Your Don Gabriele is here for you. You are a dear girl. I am very fond of you, and think you very nice; in fact, I am glad that you are free of that selfish Roberto.'

'Good-morning — good-morning, cavaliere,' she interrupted, turning to go away, finding it insupportably painful to hear what he said, and having until now only listened from politeness.

'I will come to take you out this evening. Shall we take supper together? You will not? But why not? I am an honest man and a gentleman. You will soon see the difference between me and that poor little counter-jumper. You won't? You are still a little sad, eh? You are going to shut yourself up in the house for a little? Good, good! I will wait. Don Gabriele is a patient man. My dear girl, don't lose this piece of good fortune; you won't have such chances every day.'

And he re-entered the pharmacy, inwardly irritated, but outwardly calm and serene.

The evening that 'Rolla' was given for the first time the little theatre was crowded with an audience almost identical with that which frequented San

Carlo in the winter, because the Neapolitans belonging to the beau-monde do not leave Naples until the middle of July.

Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio was seated in the very first row of armchairs, and the attention he paid Carmela was so marked, his shouts of 'Bravo, Carmela!' so loud, the flowers he presented to her so brilliant and fragrant, that the poor girl forgot her sadness in her embarrassment and confusion. The companions who had sneered at her for three days now envied her, because for nearly all ballet-girls Don Gabriele represented the ideal lover and protector—old, rich, fond of women, generous, occupied for several hours every day, and therefore easily deceived. The two sisters Musto, who danced in the first row with her, implored her to be sensible, not to lose this splendid chance, to have a few days at least of comfort and luxury, and to lay up a little money for a rainy day. And was not Don Gabriele a most attractive man—well dressed, perfumed?

Carmela, confused and frightened, shook her head, saying, 'No, no!' hoarsely, determined to refuse, but not knowing how to do so without being rude. And so, only because she did not know how to say 'No!' and although she told him so frankly, she was persuaded to take supper that evening with Don Gabriele at Santa Lucia Nuova in the new restaurant Starita.

The restaurant Starita is situated on a tiny

peninsula between the mainland and the sea, on which is also built the fortress called Ovo. The peninsula is surrounded by the sea in a little artificial port, where yachts, cutters and yolas ride at anchor. All along the peninsula runs a row of low houses of one story. Built originally for the sailors formerly inhabiting the old street of Santa Lucia, this row of houses is called Borgo Marinai, although the sailors have not yet come there to live, because Santa Lucia has not yet been entirely demolished. In the meantime, the little *borgo* is inhabited by operatives of the very poorest class, and by all the people employed in the neighbouring bathing establishments and *café chantants*.

At the very end, where the peninsula juts out into the sea, there are several *trattorie* and restaurants, with tables temptingly spread under bright coloured awnings, and with gaily-painted wooden balustrades, from which one can lean over the blue sea below. In the summer season these restaurants are crowded all day long and far into the night. Among them the restaurant Starita is the most chic, the most aristocratic, as it is also really the best. Sitting on the balcony of the Starita on the long summer evenings, one can watch the lights in the yachts and cutters glimmer above the darkening water, while in the distance the electric lights in the two great hotels shine far over the sea, and brilliant equipages drive ceaselessly along the quays.

Behind, the dark fortress Ovo rears its sombre walls—the very ideal of a tragic castle; and beneath its shadow, and with the exquisite beauty of the sea smiling before them, the frequenters of the restaurants can dine or sup as the case may be. Dishes of fish, fish-soup, fried fish, are served here, as they were once served at Posilippo, now out of fashion and almost deserted, because three-quarters of an hour distant from Naples, whereas Santa Lucia is in the very heart of the city.

The restaurants are expensive, but the view is so lovely that people do not quarrel about the price; and all the world goes there, especially all the men of society.

On this particular evening, Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio showed really exquisite tact in not alarming Carmela in any way. It was quite enough for him, as a beginning, that the girl should have accepted his invitation to supper at the restaurant Starita, where everyone would be sure to see her with him. This was all he desired for the present. He was not in the least in love with her; at his age, as he frequently declared, he was not stupid enough to fall in love with every woman more or less young. Perhaps he had never been in love in his life, feeling, like the egoist he was, that such a sentiment would have seriously disturbed the line of conduct he had marked out for himself—that of a life dedicated solely to pleasure. Carmela had always

pleased him, although she was neither beautiful, lively, nor graceful.

'She was young—she was "new,"' he said to himself; 'she had not learned all the deceitfulness and perversity of the women who are accustomed to see the worst side of life;' and this was enough for Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio.

It was not a conquest to be proud of, especially as another lover had preceded him; but at sixty years old the gay druggist knew how to accept facts, and he was almost glad that Roberto Gargiulo had preceded him, and that he could take his place without self-reproach or remorse. Carmela had preferred Roberto to him, it is true, but he was too thorough a philosopher to be angry because a young man had been preferred to him. And now that this poor wounded soul had fallen into his hands, he treated her with perfect tact and kindness, never speaking of love. He knew well how to take women—capricious, feeble, incomprehensible creatures, but not incomprehensible to a man who has thought of nothing but women for forty years.

He walked along the street by Carmela's side, not giving her his arm, not talking sentimentally, but amusing her by a hundred witty sayings and entertaining anecdotes of his travels, for though he worked hard ten months of the year, he allowed himself a holiday of a month in the spring and a month in the autumn. On such occasions he never remained in

Italy. He always went to other countries, oftenest to Paris. As they passed under the dark shadow of the fortress Ovo, he said to Carmela:

'Carmelina, I must take you to Paris some day.'

Carmela forced a smile. She knew that Don Gabriele only said this from pure politeness; she forbore to interrupt him for the same reason. Although it was so late, the restauant Starita was crowded; its lighted lamps shone on tables surrounded by groups of three, four or five Neapolitans; the waiters ran hither and thither, having more to do than they could well manage.

'Do you like it here, Carmela?'

'Yes, it is pretty,' she answered, looking at the city, the sea, and Vesuvius burning in the distance.

They found a little table, arranged for two persons, near a much larger one, prepared for a party of eight, and covered with plates of *hors d'œuvres*, pyramids of fruit, and bouquets of flowers. It had been engaged since early in the morning, the waiter said, and the guests would arrive in a few moments. Don Gabriele, always inquisitive, asked who they were, and the man named two or three of them.

'The Duke of Sanframondi, Count Ferdinando Terzi, Count Althan——'

'All friends—all acquaintances,' said the druggist joyously, infinitely happy to be in the neighbourhood of such distinguished people.

Carmela Minino looked at him with imploring

eyes; she felt an imperious desire to go away, but she had not the courage to say so to her companion. Rush away—but where? What would Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio think? That she was a mad creature, a fool. How could she say it to him? What could she say to him? and why should she go away? There or in another place—would it not be the same thing?

She swallowed down the hot tears which rose to her eyes, and remained in her place, on thorns, answering Don Gabriele as well as she could when he asked her what she would have for supper, and sitting up straight and rigid in her black-and-white striped silk, the only one which she possessed, and looking the colour of clay, under her pale-blue gauze hat—a hat which the milliner had insisted on making for her, and which was frightfully unbecoming. It was so near the other table! And, in fact, after a few moments the four couples arrived, and entered with much loud talking and laughing on the part of the women—Concetta Giura, Emilia Tromba, the Spanish singer Mariquita, who had an engagement at the Eldorado, and the beautiful pantomime actress, Alina Bell. They sat down, still talking and laughing noisily, beside the four silent gentlemen who accompanied them. Carmela had not seen Concetta and Emilia since the close of the season at San Carlo, as these two young ladies allowed themselves the luxury of not dancing in summer. And

although it was perfectly well known that Sanframondi was dead-tired of Concetta Giura, and that Ferdinando Terzi had never cared for Emilia, and only used her as a blind to deceive a jealous husband, the two gentlemen took their mistresses everywhere, giving them country jaunts, dinners or suppers, as the case might be. In taking their places, it happened that Ferdinando Terzi sat down directly opposite to Carmela. Nothing in his aspect was changed; he wore a white carnation in the buttonhole of his elegant evening smoking-jacket; his blond moustaches curled as softly as ever above the red, sensual lips which never smiled; the noble profile, so rigidly aquiline that it seemed chiselled in marble, was as beautiful as ever; the large, light-blue eyes as proud and glacial. For one instant he fixed them on Carmela, then he turned to Emilia with a question. Carmela knew that he was asking about her, and the place and company in which he found her. And when Emilia replied in a laughing whisper, she knew that she was relating the story of her fall. Still looking intently at her, he murmured two words of reply to Emilia, with a contemptuous curl of the lip. Carmela heard these two words:

'A fool!'

Carmela looked through the darkness at the city, the sea, and the burning mountain. But she saw nothing, and in her heart she felt that all was vanity.

IV

It was New Year's Eve. At San Carlo a matinée of the 'Barber of Seville' had been given, without a ballet; but in the evening 'Aida' was to be given with singers of the first rank, and with the ballet 'Dr. Cappelius,' a short, light ballet, well fitted to follow a long, heavy opera like 'Aida,' as well as to show off the strength and agility of Maria Giuri, a new prima donna ballet-dancer, with large eyes, who was excessively thin, and who seemed formed of steel springs. All the ballet-dancers, with their respective protectors and families, were delighted. It was a nice little half-way ballet, as they called it in the jargon of their profession, with only three changes of dress for the first row of dancers, and two changes for the second and third rows, but little fatigue, or comparatively little, and the pay the same as for a long ballet. Everyone, therefore, was pleased. But the Direction had, of course, invented something to spoil their pleasure: having insisted, and continuing to insist, that twenty ballet-girls should come to the theatre before the beginning of the opera—namely, at half-past seven every evening—to dance in the second and fourth acts of 'Aida,' the sacred dance in the

temple of Ftha, while in the second part they had to figure in the cortège which accompanied Rhadames the victor. It had not been easy to find twenty ballet-girls willing to sacrifice themselves in this manner, from half-past seven in the evening to one o'clock in the morning, dressing first in the Egyptian costumes belonging to 'Aida,' with the golden ibis in the hair and floating violet robes, and lastly in the German costume for 'Dr. Cappelius.' It was fatiguing work —work for slaves, the ballet-girls said—and the Direction had been compelled to accept the services of the girls who danced in the second and third rows, and who were the ugliest and most ungraceful, but also the hardest workers. Carmela Minino was one of these, she who could never say no when it was a question of being useful in any way.

On this New Year's evening, although there was an official reception at the Reggia di Napoli after the dinner given at Court, and although there was a ball at Palazzo Savignano, San Carlo was crowded. The most fashionable people went there, either before the royal reception or after it, on their way to the ball at Palazzo Savignano. All the women were in brilliant full toilets, blazing with jewels, and they, too, divided their time between the royal reception, the theatre, and the ball. As a background for this distinguished and glittering public there was the mass of people in general, who went neither to the royal reception nor to Palazzo Savignano, either

because they were not of a rank to be admitted to court, or had not been invited to the ball, but who nevertheless wished to give themselves the air of belonging to the beau-monde. The women of this second public were also in full dress, as were the men. Although the theatre was bitterly cold, the calorifères being inadequate to heat it, and although there was a cold draught whenever the curtain was lifted, there was such a tremendous crowd that the women were flushed, and fanned themselves slowly with their large fans of white ostrich plumes.

The ballet-dancers meanwhile were hastily fastening their golden corselets, that they might be ready for the sacred dance round Amneris, the proud and passionate daughter of the Pharaohs, and notwithstanding the heat given by the many flaring gas-lights, many of the girls trembled with cold. Checchina Cozzolino especially had a violent cold, and could not succeed in whitening her red nose either with paint or with cold cream and powder. Carmela Minino meanwhile powdered her arms, those dark-brown arms which looked like greenish clay when contrasted with the violet skirts and golden corselet she wore. Concetta Giura came to ask for some vaseline, if anyone had it, for her hands were chapped, and the rice-powder irritated them. While Rosina Musto held the pot of vaseline for her, Concetta tossed a piece of news to the eight girls who were dressing:

'Do you know what has happened? A gentleman has been killed! a nobleman——'

'Who—who—who?' screamed four or five of the girls.

'And who killed him—who—who?' screamed the others, while the call-boy knocked and shouted at the door.

'I don't know—I don't know!' she answered, rushing away. 'If I find out, I will come and tell you!' she screamed from the corridor.

'As you know,' said Rosina Musto, in a low voice, but so distinctly as to be heard by all present, 'Sanframondi has abandoned Concetta.'

Nearly all of them knew it, even Carmela Minino. She said nothing, but feigned to arrange the ibis in her hair. She had become of late more reserved and more gloomy, very abstracted and inattentive to what she did. Whether she were dressed for the street or for the ballet, she always kept in a corner where she sat with downcast eyes, apparently unconscious of all that passed around her. She had not attended to what Concetta had said, but the words reached her brain nevertheless. As the call-boy knocked for the second time, she asked herself: Who could have been killed in that great world where people were too fortunate to want to kill themselves, where they were only killed in duels? A duel, perhaps?

The dancers re-entered, having finished the sacred dance, and they had now to wait until, at the sound

of the famous march, they were called to follow Rhadames. They walked up and down, chatting, pulling their shoulder-straps with the gesture so peculiar to ballet-dancers, who are apparently always afraid that their waists will slip down. Some of them touched up their faces, others arranged their hair or blew on their cold fingers. No one sat down, for fear of spoiling the pretty flimsy skirts. Carmela Minino leaned against the door, her arms hanging by her sides, her gaze fixed on vacancy.

'What are you thinking of—of the sheep you have in Puglia?' said Filomena Scoppa, laughing, and using ironically the popular phrase for the preoccupation caused by great wealth.

'I have a headache,' answered Carmela, in a low voice.

'And you come here to dance? Why did not you stay at home?'

'At home? I am so dull,' murmured Carmela languidly.

'*No!*' exclaimed the other ironically, because since Carmela had fallen she was despised by Filomena, now the only honest girl in the *corps de ballet*.

At this moment the blonde Concetta Giura ran in, panting.

'I made a mistake, I made a mistake! They told me one thing, and meant another! He was not killed, this gentleman, this nobleman; he killed himself; he committed suicide!'

'But who is he—who is he?' screamed the girls, forming a circle round Concetta.

'I don't know. No one knows as yet. They say it is a young man who has killed himself; that's all I know.'

'For debt?'

'For love?'

'Nonsense! Love! bah! love? Debts, of course!'

'I don't know anything,' she answered, opening her arms. 'Some other news we shall have assuredly.'

Carmela Minino had formed one of the circle round Concetta Giura. Her head ached, perhaps in consequence of the loud voices, and the ibis weighed like lead. She did not say a word. All the noise and chatter reached her ear like a vain, irritating hum. And it was necessary to take her place in the procession. Who could have killed himself? Poor fellow! Who knew how and why? she said to herself, but without dwelling on the thought. The pain in her head was so great, there was such a weight on all her limbs, and she felt unutterably sad that evening, though she did not know why.

The orchestra began the first notes of the march. Concetta Giura, Carmela Minino, and the other girls rushed to take their places. An icy wind blew from the wings and made them shiver. So the impresario wanted to send them all to the other world with

bronchitis, pneumonia, consumption? Fortunately, it would be warmer near the footlights. As they filed along the stage Concetta, who was two rows in advance of Carmela, turned and said:

'Carmela, look there in the *palco dei nobili!*'

This *palco dei nobili* was really that of the Club Nazionale, a large proscenium box to the right of the stage, where every member of the club makes a point of appearing on theatre nights, if only for five minutes, either because of an appointment with some friend, or to glance round the house through the green gauze screen in search of some lady, or to leave paletot and cane in order to make visits in the different boxes. From this vantage ground, too, the clubmen can compliment the ballet-dancers or joke with them, or even make appointments.

At Concetta's suggestion Carmela looked at the box. There were three or four gentlemen at the back of the box who were talking eagerly among themselves. Carmela recognised the Duke of Sanframondi and Count Althan. She could not distinguish the others, who were in deep shadow. While she was looking they all left the box, which remained empty for some time. Then appeared Inigo Assante, a pale, slender youth, who sat down without even glancing at the stage, and then hurriedly left the box, as if he had been called from without. Meanwhile, the procession retired, and the ballet-girls returned to their dressing-rooms, there to wait until

they were called to dance the sacred funereal dance on the stone which covers the grave of the traitor Rhadames.

An hour elapsed, which seemed an eternity to Carmela Minino. Up to this time she had felt ill and stupefied. Now a feverish energy supervened—a wild desire to move, speak, and act. She longed to leave her dressing-room and go to that of the ballet-girls of the first row, in order to speak to Concetta Giura. She wanted to ask her whether she had seen Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande in the *palco dei nobili*—whether he were not one of the two who stood in the shadow talking with Sanframondi and Althan.

As the moments passed, she wished more and more to do this, but she was too shy. They said that Terzi had abandoned Emilia Tromba in October, and that she had already given him a successor in the Marquis of Rivadedro, an old *viveur* who had already devoured two fortunes, and, with Emilia's help, was getting through a third. Of course, one of the two noblemen who stood in the shadow must have been Count Terzi, who was always with Sanframondi and Althan; perhaps they were discussing this suicide, which was a blow to them all. Perhaps the unfortunate man had been a friend of theirs.

While waiting for the last act of 'Aida,' Carmela revolved all these thoughts in her mind, but she could not summon the courage to go and find Con-

cetta. Besides, Concetta was so fond of gossip that she would have come at once had she heard anything new. Notwithstanding the dull restlessness which caused her to tremble internally, Carmela did not move. The trembling was caused by her headache, she thought, which now had transformed itself into a series of sword-thrusts, which pierced her brain every moment or two. She suffered acutely, but she was silent, and so timid, that she never said anything about her sufferings, either physical or mental, even to persons of her own sex. At last the ballet was called, and the girls ran out, adjusting their airy skirts as they flew along.

The scene in the last act of 'Aida' is divided into two stages, upper and lower, the upper being the temple of Ftha, where the funereal ceremonies and mortuary dance are performed, and the lower the crypt in which Rhadames and Aida sing their adieu to earth and life, and in a delirium of love and death see the heavens open to receive them. While the dance is still going on in the temple, Amneris appears, veiled in black and weeping. She passes the dancers in their floating robes, approaches the tomb, kisses it, lays a flower upon it, and kneels in prayer. Meanwhile, the dance proceeds to the sound of the mystic music chanted to Ftha. The ballet-girls were divided into two groups, half placed in the wings on one side of the stage and half on the other, and they alternately advanced, receded, and crossed

each other, and then dissolved to form four immovable groups.

Concetta Giura issued from the wings at the right of the stage, leading the line of ballet-dancers, and Carmela Minino moved from the left, the two groups dancing a languid Oriental dance. Towards the close, when the figure of the ballet brought them together, Concetta said in an agitated voice:

'You would never believe—no, you could never believe—who it is that has killed himself!'

'Who?' stammered Carmela.

Concetta had no time to answer, because the movement of the ballet divided them for five or six minutes; then, as the music grew faster and they were once more together, Concetta said:

'Ferdinando Terzi has killed himself—shot himself through the heart with a revolver——'

Carmela stopped short. Quivering from head to foot, she retreated to the back of the stage, and leaned against one of the imitation columns of the temple. A crowd of priests and altar-servers passed back and forth before her, and one of them, seeing that she was pale and leaned her head against her arm, said:

'What is the matter? Do you feel ill, signorina?'

She looked the man full in the face without answering. She had not understood what he said, as she understood no longer where she was, nor what was meant by the shouts of the singers, the

rolling music of the orchestra, the excited spectators, the strangely-dressed actors, and the flying figures of the ballet-girls, who turned every now and then an inquisitive, but indifferent, glance upon her.

All this she saw through a mist, and it seemed to her that she was nailed to that column of papier-maché, that her legs in their silken tights were bound to it with iron bands, that she struggled vainly against these bands in an agony of desire to fly away—away. Then the silent anguish became more intense, more profound; her will steadied itself and strained, as if she were about to break an iron bar, and suddenly she was free to go whither she would.

She rushed away from the stage while the scene was closing, dashed into the dressing-room, and began to tear the ibis from her hair, and unfasten her glittering corselet, with trembling hands which tore and broke everything they touched. The ballet-girls entered in wild confusion, all talking about the suicide, shouting, screaming, contradicting each other, repeating the rumours already circulated in the theatre and on the stage, disputing, and almost coming to blows.

'He killed himself at eight o'clock.'

'No, signora, at ten——'

'He killed himself in his own house.'

'But, no—his own house, no! He had not been home for twenty-four hours——'

'They thought he had left Naples.'

'He had said that he was going to Rome.'

'He killed himself in a hotel.'

'The Grand Hotel—the Grand Hotel!'

'Not at all—at the Hotel Royal——'

'What are you saying? How stupid you are! He killed himself at the Suisse, in the Via Molo.'

'A gentleman like him in that hole!'

'But I tell you that it was at the Royal!'

'At the Suisse—at the Suisse! It seems he had only five francs in his pocket.'

'But he has not killed himself for debts——'

'For love—for love!'

'What a pity! Such a handsome young man!'

'The handsomest young man I ever saw. I could have loved him.'

'Now he is dead—he is dead.'

'He did not please me; he was too proud.'

'And Emilia Tromba—what will Emilia Tromba say?'

'What does she care? She has another already. She has never loved anyone in this world.'

'Except that coachman, who was her first love——'

'A coachman?—a *coachman?* And she had arrived at Ferdinando Terzi?'

'Yes, and how she has spent his money for him! She, too, has been one of the causes of his death.'

'He has killed himself for that lady, you know——'

'What lady?—what lady?'

'The Countess of Miradais——'

'The Countess of Miradais—yes, yes——'

Carmela continued to undress, and instead of turning away, as had been her habit, when she stripped off her tights—for she was a modest creature—she tore everything off recklessly, and threw it away from her, seizing her out-of-door clothes and throwing them on with trembling hands, which were incapable of tying strings, fastening hooks and eyes, or slipping buttons in the button-holes. She heard all that was said, with downcast eyes, compressed lips, and an expression of ferocious anger on her face. Seeing that she was dressed to go away:

'What are you doing? Don't you remember that we have to dance in "Dr. Coppelius"?' asked Filomena Scoppa.

Carmela looked at her without answering, and put on her jacket.

'Are you going away?—are you really going away?' said Rosina Musto. 'Don't you feel well?'

Carmela Minino put on her hat, pricking herself with her hat-pins as she did so, glanced round vaguely as she took up her gloves and bag, and left the room without bidding anyone good-night.

'But what is the matter? What has happened to her?'

'Who knows?'

'She has been like a crazy woman for some time.'

As Carmela walked with a quick, decided step down the corridor which led to the grand entrance she knocked against and jostled several people, but she saw and heard nothing. Only when she reached the portico she saw two or three gentlemen standing and talking, wrapped in their fur paletots.

Some stray phrases caught her ear:

'Dead! three hours ago.'

'The family has not been told yet.'

'There can be no religious services.'

The icy tramontana wind blew in Carmela's face, but she did not feel it. She had rubbed her face violently to take off the paint, and her cheeks burned. She went down the steps and looked right and left for a carriage. And at this moment Don Gabriele Scagnamiglio appeared before her, comfortably wrapped in his rich furred paletot, with his beautiful white beard carefully brushed and perfumed, his silver-headed ebony cane in his hand, and the usual expression of jovial, careless, selfish enjoyment. She started away from him with something like aversion.

'Where are you going, my pretty one?' he asked, not perceiving her agitation.

She had called an open carriage, and was getting in as he spoke.

'But one may know where you are going,' said Don Gabriele imperiously, in the tone of a master.

She had already taken her seat, and with downcast eyes and grinding teeth she replied:

'Wherever I please.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Don Gabriele ironically. 'Already? And when shall we meet again?'

'Never again,' she answered in a choked voice, full of irrepressible scorn, as the carriage turned towards Chiaia.

Don Gabriele shrugged his shoulders, and entered the theatre.

When Carmela's cab reached the Grand Hotel it wanted a quarter to twelve o'clock. The carriage had come in ten minutes from San Carlo, because the coachman, chilled by the tramontana, had beaten his horse without mercy, urged thereto by Carmela, who implored him to drive quickly if he wanted extra pay.

The coachman glanced back at her occasionally, and thought that she could not feel the cold, whoever she was, as she did not turn up the collar of her jacket, and looked continually right and left, at the Villa Nazionale, looming dark in the dark night, and at the black water, which beat and moaned against the sea-wall.

The cab turned round the garden in front of the Grand Hotel, and Carmela sprang hastily out. The great door of the magnificent place was still open, for *forestieri* were expected in the midnight train from Rome, and others, already staying in the hotel, were at the theatre. The majestic Suisse, gorgeous in full livery, with his hat and gilt hat-band well pulled

down over his eyes, walked to and fro. Carmela went directly up to him.

'Excuse me,' she said, looking him straight in the eyes, 'has a gentleman killed himself here?'

'What do you say? What do you mean, signora?' stammered the porter, stupefied with astonishment at such a question.

'I want to know if Count Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande has killed himself here,' she repeated distinctly.

The porter looked at her for a moment as if he thought her mad. Then he answered politely:

'No, signora; no one has committed suicide here.'

She hesitated for a moment, looking at him fixedly, as if she wished to wrench a decided reply from him.

'Tell me the truth,' she murmured, with a trembling voice—'tell it to me; I must know it! If it was here, tell me——'

She was now so agitated that the porter began to understand, and he replied gently:

'I assure you, signora, that the gentleman did not kill himself here.'

'Then please excuse me. Good-night and thank you. Good-night.'

The porter saw her turn away with a firm step, and, after saying a word to the coachman, she got into the carriage again and drove away at a furious pace along the Via Caracciolo, now absolutely deserted and sombre, with the dark sea rolling heavily

on one side and the thick foliage of the Giardino Nazionale on the other.

'Quick, quick, for the love of God!' called Carmela to the coachman.

By this time the coachman had divined that something terrible had happened to the poor girl, and turning every now and then, he looked curiously and compassionately at her as she quivered with impatience and drove through the bitterly cold night from one hotel to another. When they stopped at the Hotel Royal in the Via Chiatamone the doors were being closed; even the porter had gone to bed, and no one remained but the night-watchman, who was lying on a bench in the hall. Carmela addressed her strange tragic question to him. This night-watchman was a Neapolitan. He looked at her with an ironical smile and said:

'My daughter, someone has played a trick on you.'

'No, the gentleman has really killed himself,' she answered, looking round her with so pale a face and such burning eyes that the watchman at once ceased to joke.

'But not here—not here, God be praised!'

'Are you certain of that, good man—quite certain?'

'As certain as death, my daughter.'

'Then good-night—good-night. I will go somewhere else.'

When she was once again in the street Carmela

felt utterly discouraged. The coachman waited, looking at her attentively.

'It is not here, either,' she murmured to herself, with an infantile expression of despair.

'But who are you looking for, signorina? Who are you looking for?' said the coachman, glad to be able to satisfy his curiosity.

'A person,' she stammered—'a gentleman who has killed himself.'

'Madonna del Carmine! And he was something to you, this gentleman?'

She looked at the man without speaking. He began to understand that the suicide was 'something' to her.

'And you don't know where?'

'They told me two or three hotels, but he was not there. I have not found him——'

'Did they tell you any others?'

'Yes—yes, the Suisse. Where is it? At the Molo, they told me.'

'Who knows, signorina mia? I have never heard of such a hotel. Let us go to the Molo. Who has a tongue in his head can go to Sardinia.'

They passed before San Carlo just as people were leaving it; but Carmela did not look round. It was past midnight, and she feared that the Suisse might be shut. They passed Piazza San Carlo, Piazza Municipio, and drove along the Via Molo, while they both looked in every direction for the Suisse.

Finally, in an angle between Via Porto and Via Molo, in a corner where they were already beginning to pull down the old part of Naples, they saw a forlorn sign swinging in the wind. The light of a street-lamp fell across it, and they read 'Pension Suisse.'

'It is there,' she breathed, looking up at the balcony. The windows were shut, the lace curtains closely drawn, but behind the curtains a light was visible.

The door of the Pension Suisse was partly open—a little way. Carmela slid in, and found herself in a dark, damp hall, feebly lighted by a smoky petroleum lamp.

A shabbily dressed man, with a greasy, ragged cap on his head, was walking up and down, and whistling an air from 'Cicuzza.' Carmela approached him; the man turned his flabby face and furtive eyes towards her, and looked at her suspiciously.

'Is it here,' she said, repeating for the third time her mournful query—'is it here that Count Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande killed himself?'

'Yes, for our misfortune,' grumbled the man in reply.

'Ah!' she exclaimed, growing paler than before.

Suddenly she turned, went out of the door, opened her purse and paid the coachman. He looked at her with compassionate eyes.

'You have found him, eh?' he asked, in a tone full of sympathy.

'Yes, I have found him,' answered Carmela, in her dull, choked voice, adding a franc of *pourboire* to the fare.

'Shall I wait for you, signorina? answered the coachman, touched by the adventure and the franc.

'No, don't wait for me.'

She re-entered the door, but the porter barred the way.

'Where are you going?'

'To see the corpse.'

'Do you belong to the family?' said the man, looking at her steadfastly.

'No.'

'And, then, why do you want to go up?'

'I am his servant,' she answered, slipping two francs into his hand.

Fortunately she had two weeks' pay in her purse —money which she had received that very day. She felt her way upstairs—a narrow stair, at the head of which a light burned. It was a feeble light, and barely served to show the staircase, the dirty walls, the forlorn landing, bare save for a shabby strip of cocoa-matting. A manservant sat there, dozing beside the table where the lamp burned. Carmela at once understood, not only that it was a third-class pension, but one of ill-fame; the horrible rooms being let for a day, half a day, two hours, or one hour,

to people who arrived in haste and without luggage, who paid in a hurry on arriving, and departed hurriedly and silently, creeping away with downcast eyes and noiseless steps. Three doors opened on the ante-room; two were closed, but the third, the one opposite the staircase, was partly open—a pale ray of light issued from it.

'I wish to see the corpse,' said Carmela abruptly, looking at the door.

The waiter rubbed his eyes and said:

'Are you a relation?'

'I am—a pensioner,' she answered, struggling to repress the sobs which shook her from head to foot.

'No relations have come yet. Some friends, but they went away immediately. We expect the *pretore*. Go in.'

Carmela entered alone. The room was the largest in the hotel, and occupied an angle of the building, having one balcony on Via Molo and one on Via Porto. Coarse lace curtains, which had been white, but were now yellow with dust and time, were nailed closely over the windows, and curtains exactly like them, even to the marks of smoke and dirt, hung from the cornice. A faded carpet, worn thin, covered the floor; an old-fashioned toilet with a dim greenish mirror, a bureau with a marble top, a writing-table, and four Vienna chairs completed the furniture of the room, at once dirty and pretentious, which had been the theatre of so many adventures. An enor-

mous bed stood at the end of the room facing the door, beneath a baldachin of green serge. On the bed, where he had killed himself, lay the body of Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande, awaiting the official visit of the *pretore*.

The bed had not been made up—a coverlet of green serge had been spread over the mattress; sheets there were none, but the pillows were in their white under-covers, edged with crochet lace. The green serge coverlet was stained with blood, and the carpet at the side of the bed where the Count had killed himself was soaked with it; the shirt-front was dyed deep red. Ferdinando had been in full evening dress when he had killed himself, and an exquisite, stainless gardenia was still in his buttonhole. His furred paletot lay on a chair at a distance. The right hand, with which he had shot himself straight through the heart, had fallen by his side, and now lay on the bed, still holding a small silver revolver, finely chiselled, and somewhat tarnished; the left hand clutched the coat over the heart, and the fingers and back of this hand were bathed in blood. But with this exception there was no sign of pain—nothing in the least distressing in the aspect of the body, which was stretched out at full length in an easy attitude of repose, as if awaiting sleep. The head of the corpse rested calmly on two pillows, which were quite unruffled; the composed tranquillity, now the dominant expression of the face, had evidently pre-

ceded death. The beautiful, blond, chestnut hair, parted in the centre in the Russian fashion, was smooth and undisturbed; the exquisite mouth showed its finely chiselled red line under the silky blond moustache; the pure, austerely perfect profile stood out in undiminished beauty; the round, firm chin was as sternly resolute as ever. The lids were lowered over the large blue eyes; the metallic light, the keen glance, now indifferent, now proud, now contemptuous, was extinguished. And notwithstanding the degraded aspect of the Pension Suisse and the low, ignoble room—notwithstanding the bloodstains on the breast and hand of the dead, and on the bed and carpet—notwithstanding the horrible manner of his death, the dead man still preserved the noble beauty which had come to him from the hand of his Maker, the result of race and education and taste and surroundings, and which neither his sins nor his tragic end could do away with. On the contrary, death had given an added charm to the noble countenance—something purer, more simple, more youthful, the origina lnoble beauty, before the world soiled it.

Standing at the foot of the bed, and resting her clasped hands on the footboard, Carmela gazed long at the dead man. She had sought him far and wide that night, rushing madly through Naples to the grandest hotels, and she had found him finally, alone, in this wretched tavern, unwept, unwatched, save for

the dozing waiter in the hall. Now she could gaze her fill upon him, solace her tearless, burning eyes, while she clasped her hands over her heavily beating heart.

She had found him. Ferdinando Terzi's mother was not there yet. Ever since her widowhood she had lived at her castle in Puglia. His married sister, the Marchesa di Vallicella, was not there either; no one had dared to tell her as yet. And the dark and brilliant Marchesa di Miradais, his love, was absent also, still ignorant of her loss. Only Carmela was there, and she contemplated Ferdinando Terzi as she had never dared to do in his lifetime, devouring with her eyes the face which death had rendered more noble and beautiful than ever. The magnificent eyes were closed for ever, but she knew their glance so well that she had but to imagine them open and fixed on a distant point of vision, and the face before her was alive once more, only even more beautiful than in life.

The door opened, and several persons entered; but before they had a chance of seeing her, Carmela glided behind the curtains which hung loose before the windows, as probably the dead man himself had arranged them, in order to protect himself from the curiosity of the neighbourhood. The persons who had come in were the *pretore*, with his clerk, the landlord, the head waiter, the Duke of Sanframondi, and Count Althan. From the hiding-

place where she stood, holding her breath, Carmela saw and heard the gloomy formalities which accompany a death by suicide. The *pretore*, evidently intensely annoyed at having been obliged to come out in the bitter cold at that late hour, threw himself puffing and panting into the only easy-chair the room afforded. Though only thirty years old, he was already fat and heavy, and the rickety chair creaked and groaned beneath his weight. The *pretore's* clerk, a small, thin man, with eyes reddened by want of sleep, shivered in the cold night air, and kept his shabby coat-collar turned up as he sat down to write. And the following deposition was taken:

'The two gentlemen here present, Duke Leopold Caracciolo Rossi di Sanframondi and Count Francisco Federici di Althan, personal friends of the deceased, declare and swear that the person who has committed suicide is none other than Count Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande, eldest son of the late Count Giovanni Terzi di Torregrande and of Donna Maria Angela di la Puiserage. They also recognise his clothes, his jewels, his furred paletot, and the revolver with which he has killed himself.

'The director of the Pension Suisse declares and swears that the aforenamed Count Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande presented himself at the hotel at seven o'clock this evening, and engaged a room in which to pass the night. Seeing that he was a person of distinction, Raffaele Scarano, director

of the aforesaid Pension Suisse, did not ask him his name or place of residence, nor why he was without luggage. He did not know the gentleman's name until later, after the suicide. Count Ferdinando Terzi paid the price of the room—the best in the Pension Suisse—four francs and a half, and did not accept the change for the five francs he offered in payment, and said that he would return to the hotel a little later. The above-named gentleman never before came to the Pension Suisse.

'The waiter at the Pension Suisse, Domenico Quagliolo, declares and swears that he caught a glimpse of Count Ferdinando Terzi when he was engaging the room and talking with the director, but did not look closely at the Count, being accustomed to look as little as possible at the travellers who stopped in the hotel, in order not to annoy them. Later, at about nine o'clock, the Count returned to the hotel alone. The landlord being away in another part of the hotel, the Count asked Domenico Quagliolo to show him his room. As he entered it, he stopped for a moment on the threshold. The waiter immediately told him that there were no sheets on the bed, but that it could be made up in a moment. The Count answered that it did not matter for the moment, because he might perhaps go out again. He was perfectly calm, and lighted a cigarette. He then dismissed the waiter, saying that he would call him later. The door was shut,

but not locked. The waiter heard the Count moving about the room, but quite quietly. Perhaps half an hour had passed when Quagliolo heard the noise of the revolver, and rushed into the room. Count Ferdinando Terzi lay gasping on the bed. He did not say a word, but opened and shut his eyes, and looked round as if seeking for something. Quagliolo insisted upon this fact. The Count died instantly, in Quagliolo's arms; one of his sleeves was still wet with blood. The landlord rushed in at once, with two commercial travellers who were staying in the house and the porter, and sent for Dr. Gaetano Marotta, who came instantly from the pharmacy Cirro in Via Porta. The doctor found the Count already dead, and wrote the necessary certificate. On the night-table by the bed had been found a card on which was engraved, "Count Ferdinando Terzi di Torregrande." On this card was written in pencil, "I kill myself because I choose to do so," with his signature. The death had been immediately announced at San Carlo at the box belonging to the National Club, where, it was supposed, some friends or relations of the deceased might probably be found.'

This affair of official declaration lasted at least an hour; the *pretore*, after he had received the sworn depositions, dictated them to the clerk. The two gentlemen stood silently by, evidently deeply moved and distressed by the death of their friend, but also

as evidently profoundly annoyed to be mixed up in the matter of the official declaration. When the *pretore* asked them a passing question as to the cause of the suicide, they avoided a direct reply and made a vague sign, evading all closer inquiry. He felt a certain respect for their distress, and did not insist further. Besides, the fact of suicide was clearly proven; the doctor's certificate was correct and legal; and the *pretore* well knew that Raffaele Scarano and Domenico Quagliolo, landlord and waiter of the Pension Suisse, had but too much reason to fear justice for private reasons of their own, and were therefore sure to have told the truth on this occasion, when they happened to be innocent. He therefore hurried the writing of the declaration as much as he could. He was dropping with sleep, and dying of cold; his poor clerk's teeth were chattering; the landlord and waiter were restless, mortally worried by the event, which would long cast a sinister shadow on the ill-reputed Pension Suisse. The dead man alone, lying quietly on the bed wet with his blood, was unmoved by the emotions to which his death had given rise. He had entered into the infinite repose by his own hand, and for some profound, unknown reason. He was untroubled, but behind the curtains a human being suffered and panted, with the impatience of desperation.

At last all the formalities were concluded. The *pretore* and his clerk left the room, accompanied by

the landlord and waiter, who were heard entreating and imploring them to do something. The Duke of Sanframondi and Althan remained in the room, talking together in a low tone, and looking at the dead body from time to time; the most prudent thing, they thought, was to leave it there, in order not to make a tumult at Casa Terzi in the middle of the night. In the early morning Sanframondi would take charge of the transportation of the body to Casa Terzi, and Althan would inform the Marchesa di Vallicella.

Religious functions were not to be thought of at that hour, in that place; they would attend to all that in the morning. They spoke low, in broken phrases, alluded in vague terms to a potent cause for the suicide. Yes, there remained nothing for their poor friend to do but kill himself. And they went away themselves, giving fifty francs to Raffaele Scarano for whatever might be necessary, and five to the waiter, begging him to watch through the night. After another glance at the body, they retired on tip-toe.

The landlord confided the care of the body to the waiter and left the room, grumbling at his ill-luck, notwithstanding the fifty francs. Who would ever take the room now that a man had killed himself there? The journals would talk of it; he was ruined.

With a great sigh of relief, Carmela issued from

her place of concealment. The waiter, who had forgotten her, looked at her with surprise.

'Go and sleep; I will watch with him,' she commanded, pointing to the door.

'But—but——'

'There are five francs. Stay in the next room, but don't come in.'

'You—certainly could not be anyone he loved?' he said, looking at her from head to foot, and evidently comparing her—so plain, so poorly dressed—with the dead man, supreme in beauty and elegance even in death.

'No, I could not be anyone he would love,' she answered in a strange tone. 'Go away, therefore.'

He went away unwillingly. She closed the door, but did not lock it. At last—at last she was alone with the dead! No one would come until the morning; the dead man was hers. From behind the curtains she had heard everything, while she was dying with impatience; neither Sanframondi, nor Althan, nor any of his friends would come before morning. The physician and *pretore* had done what they had to do, and were gone; the landlord and waiter had also disappeared. The dead man was hers for one whole night, in a remote, unknown room. She looked at him with intense reverence and pity, and moved softly across the room to take two candles, which she lighted and placed on the night-table close by the corpse. In order to do this

she was obliged to approach it very closely, and she gazed at it as if fascinated by this spectacle of funereal beauty lying bathed in blood.

Mechanically she put her hand in her pocket; she found her rosary, and, taking it out, she kissed the medal and crucifix attached to it. Cautiously, and with infinite delicacy and gentleness, she wound the rosary round the hand which clutched the dead heart of Ferdinando Terzi, allowing the crucifix and medal to rest upon his breast. In order to do this, she had not only been obliged to approach the corpse very nearly, but also to bend over it and to touch the frozen hand. Twice she started back, as if about to faint. But that pale face fascinated her; she looked round. She was alone. The night was far advanced; the silence was profound; and slowly she bent over the dead man, and pressed her lips, ever so lightly and softly, on the cold, proud brow.

The icy touch dissolved the horrible tension which bound her heart and throat, and Carmela fell on the ground, on her knees, near the bed and on the blood-stained carpet, weeping, sobbing, and calling on the dead:

'Oh, my love!—oh, my only love, my beautiful love!—you are dead, you are dead, and I live! Oh, beautiful one!—oh, my heart of hearts!—it is only dead that I could kiss you! Who would ever have told me—who—who—that I should see you dead? Oh, my love! why do I live? I! Why

does anyone live on this earth where you have died ?'

So, in the cold winter night, began the funeral dirge of Ferdinando Terzi, Count of Torregrande, in the lurid, blood-stained room of the Pension Suisse ; and she who wailed and lamented his fate, with tears and sobs, and broken words of love and sorrow, was only Carmela Minino, a third-rank ballet-dancer at San Carlo.

ON GUARD

I

THAT brilliant, warm afternoon the Naples landscape had been sleeping a long time, deserted, silent, and motionless under the lion-like August sun. In the long siesta, from mid-day till four o'clock, not the shadow of a man had been seen, going or coming, on the great green plain of Bagnoli or on the broad white road to the left that comes from Posilipo, grazing the lowest slope of the hill, which forms a cape also—a wide road that is the joy of all who love Naples, both foreigners and natives of the place. There was not a cart or carriage on the straight road called Fuorigrotta, which takes its first angle at Bagnoli, turning to go to Pozzuoli, Cuma, and Baia; there was not a ship going past Posilipo's lovely cape on its far-off journey over the sea—a black thread-like line, with a pretty feather of smoke over it; no white sail in the Procida strait, nor boat hovering around Nisida's green island, the whole length of which can be seen from the gentle shore at Bagnoli.

At the time of the siesta the sea-bathing establishment on the shore was deserted, showing empty cabins through the doors and shutters thrown wide open to the west wind. The Bagnoli inn, a resort

of pleasure-seekers, duellists, and lovers, had thrown open all its windows and doors to the terraces. Not a song came up—not a cry or sound. Even the sea seemed struck motionless with the great slumber of men and things, except that the west wind had been blowing for a time from the sea on to the land, raising up whirlwinds of dust on the Posilipo road and Fuorigrotta, bending over and raising the scattered poppies on the green coast, making little spirals of brown sand twirl at the water-edge and the venetians on the white houses flutter, taking the leaves off the passion-flower creeper on the balcony lattice in the Bagnoli inn. But the west wind, as is well known, serves with its rustling to rock to sleep the drowsy Neapolitan landscape. It is a chant that soothes the sleep of people, houses, and trees.

But the afternoon was fading into the long summer twilight, spreading a great calmness around. A sailor's wife, tall, thin and dark, with bronze-coloured legs and bare feet, came out of the bathing-place and began to gather the sheets drying in the sun from the poles they hung from. She wore a wide, often wetted, broken-in straw hat, trimmed with red ribbon, and she sang joyously. Every now and then, as she went on gathering a heap of sheets, under which her lengthy form disappeared, she looked towards Carrano villa, as if she was expecting someone. Indeed, a crowd of little boys and girls came out of the villa—lovely little English children,

escorted by a governess and maid—who were laden with bags, food, and baskets.

The bathing-woman stood still, shading her eyes with her hand, having thrown the whole weight of the sheets on to one shoulder. The babies, when they reached her, rushed round her, jumping on the wooden platform, making their pretty light hair that hung over their shoulders dance, and kicking their legs about, in spite of the governess's reproofs in English. The bathing-woman laughed with her wide mouth, showing strong teeth all streaked with black. Three or four cabins were shut, and after ten minutes the whole tribe of boys and girls went off swimming boldly between the gentle Bagnoli shore and Nisida island, puffing, crying out in queer guttural tones, and holding out their hands for the bathing-woman to throw them cakes from the top of the wooden platform. The whole shore seemed to laugh with the bathing-woman and children.

From the Fuorigrotta road a cart was coming up, going straight towards Pozzuoli—a gardener's cart, empty; all the tomatoes and green-stuffs had been sold in Naples that he came in loaded with in the morning. Then came vintners' carts with empty casks that had put down their load of Monte di Procida wine in the town. The carters, seated on narrow boards outside the carts, with legs hanging down and jacket thrown over one shoulder, went trotting along, the empty carts jumping up and down

to the lively whistle of their song, which kept time to the quick trot. A long narrow cart passed, too, with round-bellied jars of earthenware, closed by a cork bung, the Naples *mammere*, still wet and sharply scented with the mineral water they had taken into the town. The carter was in white linen shirt and breeches, bare-legged, with a long, dull-coloured cap and a short sailor's pipe in his mouth.

Some vehicles were coming along on the Posilipo road also; but these were cabs laden with country folk come to Naples for sea-bathing. They carefully went to see the neighbourhood, though they got no pleasure out of it; but they wished to be taken for foreigners. The cabman stopped at the shore, explaining that that was the Bagnoli parade-ground, where the soldiers came in the morning, at sunrise, to drill, and that the island was called Nisida, *Niseta*.

'Very fine, very fine!' the country folk exclaimed, looking at the green island, lightly mirrored in the sea, which had already become lead-coloured.

The cabman shrugged his shoulders as he drove on, turning by the Fuorigrotta road, and taking his fare under the grotto. Or there was some private carriage appearing on the Posilipo road, conveying a pretty fashionable lady who had stayed at Naples by arrangement, out of sulkiness, or for caprice, giving up the joys of summer travel. The coachman went along slowly, and the great white parasol lined

with red encircled with its aureole a thoughtful head. This carriage also stood by the shore, to gaze at the lovely island Nisida, and while it went slowly on its way towards Fuorigrotta, returning to town, the lady puzzled over what that shiny, very luminous point was that her good eyes had discovered amidst the green on the top of Nisida island.

All the inn-windows now were thrown wide open towards the sea, on to the Bagnoli plain and Fuorigrotta road. On the large covered terrace of lattice-work, with passion-flower creepers climbing over it, two very countrified waiters, still sleepy-headed, drew out rough tables with black painted legs, and spread cloths over them, putting salt-cellars in the middle, and placing tumblers of thick greenish glass upside down. At one window two people were looking out at the sea: a fair young woman, colourless and delicate-looking, dressed in a very plain dark-blue linen frock, and a man about forty, a handsome, thoughtful fellow. Twice the lady had bent towards him, asking him something with a smile, lightly leaning her hand on his arm. He seemed to answer vaguely, and be thinking of something else. The lady left him at the window without his making any remark, and came on to the terrace to look at the English children who were shrieking cheerfully in the water. She stripped a large passion-flower from the lattice-work, and tore off its petals with her teeth; then, as if fascinated, she came back

to the man at the window, spoke to him in a whisper, pointing out Nisida island lingeringly; and he listened, shaking his head, smiling a little, as if agreeing to a queer story telling about a dream.

The sea, too, in the soft summer twilight, seemed to have wakened from the drowsiness of its mid-day siesta. Near the shore the voices of children bathing rose shrilly, as they went splashing and laughing, and the bathing-woman, standing towards the shore, called out at large: 'Aniello! Aniello!' Now three fishing-boats had passed the Procida strait and were coming towards Pozzuoli, following each other, running off under the rising breeze. One could not see the continuous movement of letting down the *sciabica* into the sea, the great net of these large boats, which are held by sailors and fishermen in partnership.

Suddenly, behind two washerwomen who were coming back from Naples by Fuorigrotta road, bearing great bundles of linen on their heads, the dull trot of a horse was heard lifting its feet in cadence; it came from Naples also, by the straight, dusty road. It was a very dark, long carriage, entirely closed in; not at all like the royal post-office van, with its little coupé in front, nor the van sick soldiers are taken about in; it was quite a black one, all shut in, with wooden windows high up, like the municipal van that takes the dead to the burial-ground in times of epidemics, one which good Naples folk never see

passing, day or night, without crossing themselves and saying a prayer in a whisper or muttering a charm.

But it was not the dead folk's van. The waggon passed quickly under the Carrano villa and Bagnoli inn. An old English single lady who was reading at the villa door, waiting for her nephews and nieces to come back from the bathing, put her eyeglasses more steadily on her nose to see the black carriage better; the little fair woman at the window drew back as if alarmed. But curiosity carried it; she leant out again to follow the dull vehicle with her eyes, first threading her arm through her lover's, as if needing protection. It went past the little bathing-stand, where the woman was now sweeping the wooden path in front of the cabins; but astonishment made her stand motionless, with the thick handle of the broom in her hands. The children lying down in their knitted bathing-suits on the warm sands rose up, surprised. The black van had stopped on the sands at a little distance from them; the back-door, its only one, was opened, and first one man of the military police and then another got down from it, and a third red plume could be seen in the dull half-light of the van.

Patiently the carabineers waited, standing on the sand; they cautiously glanced now and then towards Nisida. One of them, the head man, leant towards the still open door to talk with those yet inside the

van. He parleyed for two or three minutes, with his head lowered into the black opening; then went a little way off. Another policeman got down, and finally a man came out, a young fellow, in one single leap, without touching the step, and stood straight, motionless, and silent between the military police, who formed a close triangle round him. From Carrano villa, the inn, Posilipo and Fuorigrotta roads and the bathing-place everyone was gazing intently. Suddenly, when the man appeared, there came a great hush around, and a mortal pallor took the colour out of all things on land and sea, as if the wide landscape and its inhabitants had been overcome by a deep shudder of emotion.

He was a young fellow of twenty-five, tall, strong-built, with rather round shoulders; his face was very colourless, with a fixed, opaque, milky whiteness, the delicate complexion that red-haired men have; and in the colourless face with not a hair on the pure skin, blotched only by some rare freckles, he had a pair of blue eyes of a tender azure—great, serene, almost candid eyes, like an innocent child's. Clad in old greenish trousers, all stained and ravelled at the edges, in an old maroon jacket, through which one could see the white shirt, for he had no waistcoat, with a black greasy cap that let the red tawny mane be seen, he stood quietly in that mean garb of wretchedness and breathed up strongly the sea-

breezes, as if he was happy to get that air. Only his hands were chained, not, indeed, with handcuffs, which the police call in their slang *castagnoli*, the sort that press the thumbs together, nor the common sort that fasten the wrists tight; they were chained by a real proper chain that went twice round the wrists, and was shut by a heavy padlock, a kind of doleful prison locket.

The eyes of all looking on this scene—old men and children, women and lads—invariably turned to that chain. Still he did not seem to mind it; he did not look at his hands or try to raise them; he kept quiet, giving himself up evidently to the pleasure of breathing, for he had come from a close and suffocating stone prison. If that chain had not been there, perhaps the people round would not have looked at him long, but that twist of iron, strongly soldered, that went round his wrists, attracted them all. He might have been a man like everyone else, free, contented, come there on some prison business with the police; he might have been a clerk, a time-expired man, a witness, or a relation of someone living over there.

But the chain that bound him in its invincible iron ring was his description, his name, and story —the chain is the sentence and the word that expresses the mystery. It did not matter his being young, strong, with a colourless, refined face, and blue eyes like a child's that knows no evil; that he stood quietly without looking at anyone or challeng-

ing them, overcome by the mildness of the landscape; his simple, peaceful aspect did not serve him, as he glanced now and then at Nisida island with innocent curiosity. It did him no good, for that chain was the fierce bloody tragedy; it told everyone that he was a harmful, evil being, condemned by man's justice and by the law.

The chain—the chain! It was that that made the children's laughter, the bathing-woman's hoarse voice, the fishermen's lively cries to each other, the fair lady at the window's loving speeches, the cabmen's lively cracking of their whips as they came along to Pozzuoli, the songs of the carters going at a foot pace, all sink into silence. The chain! It weighed on everyone, that relentless chain that kept the man motionless; he was a thief—a murderer, perhaps. The whole green flowery countryside around, the lovely deep brilliant sea that surrounds Nisida like a poetic lake, and the island itself standing out of the water like a fresh green flowery grove, seemed from the sudden sadness that had struck them to suffer from the suffocation of that encircling chain; things seemed soiled, deprived of their innocence, for ever, disturbed and corrupted by that apparition of wickedness and cruelty, by the shameful presence of a murderer.

But a boat left the flowery island shore, and came towards the Bagnoli sands, rowed by two boatmen dressed in dull blue with black caps. Quietly, with-

out saying a word, the men bent on the oars that cut into the waves almost noiselessly, and they landed quickly with a dull thump. First two of the military police got in, then the prisoner, with a firm step and careless air, then the third policeman. Hardly had the boat left Bagnoli shore when the black van, waiting for the embarkation, turned round, and quickly disappeared by Fuorigrotta road towards Naples. Now the boat with its load was going away to Nisida, going much slower, though the boatmen bent lower over the oars; it looked as if they found the load very, very heavy.

By that fine sea sighed for by lovers and poets, the joy of sailors and fishermen, that lovely sea that is the delight of children and poor folk, the condemned man's boat went along, dull and silent, more so than if it had carried a corpse. The conscientious military police seated round him never lifted their eyes off him for a minute, more careful and zealous than ever, dreading that unsafe crossing over the sea in a boat, for perhaps he might try to throw himself into the water; they looked him straight in the eyes, as if experience had taught these simple soldiers that a man's most secret inclinations always are shown by a quick flash in his eyes.

But the prisoner decidedly did not think of flight; he kept his coolness on the water as he had done when he got down from the van. Indeed, he looked round him with some satisfaction, as if pleased at

that sea voyage in the open air, with the boat's rocking motion. He kept his chained hands in his lap, just as if he had crossed them in a natural attitude, only he said nothing, because of the silence of the military police and the prison boatmen. Every other boat that crosses that lovely sea—pleasure boats, pink from the flaming domes of women's parasols, or rough working boats—are full of joyous voices of women, children, or fishermen; this one only was dull and silent, for it bore in it a prisoner and his dumb and sulky escort; it was carrying off to punishment a living tragedy. 'Here we are,' said the prisoner, as if to himself. The boat had bumped against the island's little stone landing-place; the boatmen held it straight, keeping it tight against a strong pile of the pier. The escort got down, still in the same order as they got in, keeping the prisoner in the middle of them.

'We will be back in a short time,' said the sergeant to the head boatman.

'Very good,' he replied.

The climb on to the island began on the broad, steep road amongst the trees—a great shady avenue, full of birds singing at sunset. Though down there at the landing-place it was getting dark already, as they continuously went up and up, they still found the light of the upper spheres. The prisoner raised his head; all these voices of Nature seemed to make him tipsy. The way was long, for it went up easily

to the highest point in the island; it took a gentle slope like the broad avenue of a park, as if it was leading up to a castle, a seat of luxury and pleasure. Only, sometimes, amidst the thickets of trees and rose-bushes, something sparkled; but the prisoner did not notice it. He was looking in front of him, delighted with that long country walk; for he had been pacing between four stone walls lately, like an animal in a cage. Only, all of a sudden, as he went along, almost without caring about his escort, he heard a slight motion amongst the trees; the prisoner's sharp ear caught it, and he guessed what it would be. He grew pale, knowing that it was a sentinel, understanding that the shimmer was on the barrel of a musket. He got deadly pale, and shook his head, as if a happy delusion had fled. Perhaps for a minute, in spite of the chain, in spite of the escort, deceived by that country walk, he had thought he was free—for one moment. He could keep up this dream no longer. They had come to an enclosure wall, to a great iron gate, barricaded and guarded by a sentinel. The sergeant showed a paper; the sentinel put down his musket, and went to open all the great heavy chains of the iron door. It fell open with a metallic hiss, and shut heavily again behind prisoner and escort. Now they were in a small square, surrounded by little one-storied houses, the offices of the Royal Penal Prison of Nisida. The sergeant, who was familiar with the place, turned towards a house in the middle

that had two stories, and went into an office on the ground floor. It was sparsely furnished, with two desks, a couch, some chairs, a crucifix, and the King's portrait. A lean, sickly clerk, with hardly any hair left, and wretchedly dressed, was sitting writing in a big register before him.

'Is the Governor not present?' asked the sergeant.

'He is coming just now,' replied the clerk. And he went on writing again without even bestowing a glance on the convict.

The Governor came in. He was a man about forty, strong, tall, with a good-natured but grave face. The military police saluted him. He returned the salute, gave a side-glance at the convict, and went to sit at the second desk. The sergeant gave him the charge-sheet.

'What is your name?' the Governor asked the convict, for the purpose of identifying him.

'Rocco Traetta,' he answered in a low voice.

'Have you any nickname?'

'I am called *Sciurillo*.'

'Where do you come from?'

'From Naples.'

'How old are you?'

'I am twenty-six.'

'You are the son of the late——?' said the Governor, raising his head.

'Son of the late Gennaro,' said the convict, without a tremor.

'You are convicted as a parricide,' remarked the Governor, bending his head a little, as if he was shuddering.

Rocco Traetta did not answer; he was waiting for another question. Meanwhile the clerk had registered the new convict.

'Is it for life?' the clerk asked the Governor indifferently.

'Yes, it is,' was the short answer.

'Number 417, a red cap,' wrote the clerk on a sheet of paper.

The Governor rang a bell. A man dressed in gray, with a black cap, came forward.

'Take him to the clothing department,' the Governor said, giving him a paper and pointing to the convict.

Rocco Traetta went out behind the warder; the military police stayed in the office. Now he was alone with the warder, but the man was going on in front, reading the paper as if he took no interest in the convict. They passed through the prison streets, broad ones with wide pavements. There were some acacia-trees already in flower. On each side rose buildings of one or two stories, not higher. The windows were decorated with flowers behind the iron gratings. They turned several street corners, the warder still in front. At last they went into a large room, which was dark already; a great kitchen fire was burning at the back of it, and two smiths were

beating on an anvil. Another warder was sitting on some sacks. Rocco Traetta's toilet was done in a moment; he got a thick linen shirt, trousers, vest, and jacket with a thread stripe of dark brick colour, and a bright-red cap, all being stamped with the figures 417. To dress him they took off the chain from his hands and threw it in a corner. But the soldering of his convict's chain which was fixed round his ankle was rather a long business. Squatted on the ground, the two smiths hammered the hot iron time about.

'It is not too tight?' one of them asked Rocco Traetta.

'No, it is just right,' he said, already feeling an unbearable weight. The chain was more than a yard long. 'Am I to be chained to anyone else?' he asked, pretending not to care.

'No,' replied the warder. 'You can hang the chain from your belt.'

In fact, there was a hook in the trouser-belt; still, even hung in this way, the chain weighed a great deal, and its iron ring, soldered round the foot, gave a sharp, continuous, intolerable sensation.

* * * * * *

When at nine o'clock the bugles went for silence, it was a profound, gentle, starry night over Nisida island. That crowd of convicts Rocco Traetta fell in among mechanically had received him with invincible suspicion, holding aloof from him, not

answering the few questions he asked them, looking at him squintingly; some had received him with an icy indifference. The two great instinctive points of that crowd of guilty men—the two animal, brutal points —are just fear, a vague, indistinct fear, of all and everyone, and a low, dull, cruel selfishness. He had gone with them to church, a great bare chapel newly whitewashed, where that throng had sat down on wooden forms. About half of them, one may say, were praying, some with fervid faith, raising the voice occasionally, as if overpowering emotion urged them to it; some with the enthusiasm of hypocrisy, which could be made out on their pallid faces, thin mouths, and squinting glances.

In church the green caps and red ones, with that number sewed on in white which is the convict's only name, were off, and the early evening light fell on hundreds of deformed malefactors' heads. But the warders, in spite of the sanctity of time and place, were standing stiffly, watching sharply, always dreading a surprise; and in the great silence could only be heard, together with the old priest's thin voice giving the benediction, the mutter of the men praying, and a monotonous tinkling of chains moving every minute, lifted up with difficulty, sometimes falling with a great clash of iron.

Huddled up in a corner, Rocco Traetta felt overcome by a great timidity; he was neither praying nor speaking, and had no other sensation, acutely,

but the unbearable weight of the iron ring at his ankle, and so as not to let it shriek, not to hear the annoying sound, he kept his hand at his belt where it hung from. A growing depression came down on the nerves of that strong, easy young fellow who had been so delighted to leave San Francesco, at Naples, a stone prison, to be taken to a fresh, open, laughing island. How did that prayer concern him? The very clash of all that iron being rattled jarred on him. He felt each convict was borne down by what was now a part of his life, inseparable from it; he saw that they all shook themselves, tormented by the weight, to try and lighten the torture of it; and seized by a great agony he could not understand, Rocco Traetta, the parricide, stood motionless, swallowed up by depression. He felt no sensation in his robust young body, except in the ankle bound with iron.

Suddenly, after a few moments of expectant silence, the priest raised the Holy Sacrament, to bless these thieves and murderers, and the convicts all threw themselves down, kneeling. The clash of iron was as if a forge had been thrown down. Drawn by the movement, Rocco Traetta cast himself down, too, and the chain jumping back, fell on him, heavy and cold against his leg and side.

Ah, no! Rocco Traetta was not fanciful, he was a primitive cruel being, ignorant and ferocious; but as the Saviour, from the shining gold sphere, circled

round in the priest's quivering hands, he felt he was covered by that chain, taken, conquered thoroughly for ever until death; and an imperious desire for flight—that idea that is at the bottom of all consciences, even the most desperate—rose up in his soul like a prayer. Why not? As they went in to supper in the great hall, whilst they were eating the potatoes boiled with tomatoes, taken out of a great tub, in porringers, greedily, like so many wild beasts, he thought that he must escape, of necessity find a means—play some trick at night; throw himself down into the sea, and so escape. The Nisida roads seemed so slightly guarded—he had neglected to notice the great height of the island that first day—so that the dream of flight went growing in his mind, as if it could not be difficult for him, a strong young fellow and very acute, with audacity and cunning to attempt escape.

Taken by this burning desire, all the time they were walking about in a large court after supper, he went round and round, dragging his chain, without noticing how hurriedly he was walking, for he was eaten up by his idea of flight. Up above, over the courtyard, the soft, starry night shone; he turned his eyes there, and felt a sharper, more insane mania for liberty.

The bugles went for silence. By squadrons, going along Nisida's deserted roads, all gazing in the neighbourhood of Bagnoli and Pozzuoli, which sparkled

with lights, the convicts went back to their dormitories. It was just so: the long room where Rocco Traetta had been allotted a bunk, mattress, and two thick sheets, had a wide window, whence one could see the starry sky and phosphorescent sea—a big window that was almost always kept open, or the smell from these human bodies would have been too unbearable with the heat. When the gas was put down, and the second bell for silence was rung, many of the convicts in the room were snoring already. Rocco Traetta gazed from his bed at that bit of sky and sea. As usual, the chains jingled at every movement the convicts made—the now invisible chain, an icy bedfellow, and this noise excited Rocco Traetta's fancy. How easy it would be to escape by that window!

But suddenly, in the far distance, a voice was heard, feeble but distinct:

'Be on the alert, sentinel!' ('All' erta, sentinella!')

A little nearer, after a minute, another voice said:

'On the alert, sentinel!' ('All' erta, sentinella!')

Still nearer, a third voice, sonorous and strong, called out:

'On the alert, sentinel!' ('All' erta, sentinella!')

Then quite close a voice cried:

'On the alert, sentinel!' ('All' erta, sentinella!')

At last the voice burst out under the window where Rocco Traetta should have been sleeping, and

after that others were heard further off, feebler, making the round of the island. Then anew, for answer, the voices sent back resoundingly this answer:

'I am alert!' ('All' erta sto!')

Then all was silent. Rocco Traetta dejectedly tried to patch together the torn edges of his dream. But hardly had he sought in the darkness to take courage again, when, in the far distance, after a quarter of an hour, the first voice began again:

'On the alert, sentinel!' ('All' erta, sentinella!')

And the long-resounding, quiet voices went on time about, passed again under Rocco Traetta's great window, went further off, and, in the distance, after making the round of the island, the answer rang out clear and shrill:

'I am alert!' ('All' erta sto!')

Every quarter of an hour—every quarter of an hour. Like a nightmare. When these voices called and answered each other one heard the noise of the chains as the convicts tossed in their sleep on their hard beds. But Rocco Traetta was not sleeping—no, he jumped up every quarter of an hour. The soldiers' honest, faithful voices said: 'We are watching; we are here, armed and ready, with quick eyes; we will never let anyone escape—never; we watch; nothing can silence our voices.' He shivered, in the dark, with helpless rage; the nightmare weighed on him. Every quarter of an hour, it was terrible. On the

starry night, over the sea, the voices lengthened out —clear, strong, faithful. He would never escape—never. And in the middle of the night, conquered, prostrate, hearing the voices always, the murderer's—the parricide's—hard heart broke, and he wept.

II

STRETCHED out on his easy-chair, after dinner, the Governor of the Royal Prison was reading a newspaper carefully from top to bottom, as slowly as if he wanted to imprint it on his memory. He read it, tasting it and pondering over it as people do who live far from great centres, isolated, but not indifferent, exiled from all society, but inquisitive about any movement of life. Sometimes, however, the worthy Governor, whose honest face lost its cold look in private life, and only kept its natural great good-nature, shook his head, as if he was reading bad news. He had been an ardent patriot, a brave soldier, his courage and enthusiasm still kept warm in that penal servitude prison, where they had sent him to wear out his energies, after the two fatalities of Lissa and Custoza. These days were evil ones for Italy; her star seemed to be setting. He shook his head; he was in low spirits, for he could not fight in 1866 as he had done in 1860. He thought any work was good, even living among convicts, if used as a means of serving his country; but he would have preferred risking his life at that time for his country in the field rather than quiver with helpless

rage in Nisida. He felt melancholy, as all those who are born for war and are candidly and ferociously in love with it feel when they have to live off martial memories, or far-off hopes of action.

'Is it bad news?' asked his wife, who was working on a baby's shift near the dining-room balcony.

'It is very bad,' he replied, without adding more.

She bent her head over her work and asked no more questions. She had asked that one, not because she was interested in politics or war, but to make some remark showing interest in her good husband—to break the silence that had already lasted too long. She was a young woman, with a thoughtful, oval face, rather worn by her motherhood. She had a slight figure, clad in a plain black cloth dress. She often glanced tenderly towards the baby, who was seated on the ground on a bit of carpet, quietly cutting out the pictures from the *Emporio Pittoresco*.

He was a pallid child of three years old, with soft curly chestnut hair and a gentle, thoughtful look like his mother's. A very quiet child, in love with pictures, delighted when he could cut out any with his little scissors. He did it very neatly, without spoiling the figures or pricking his fingers. He kept quiet for whole hours, alone, seated on the ground, surrounded by scattered pages of illustrated newspapers.

'Mario!' his father called out, after gazing at him some time with affectionate interest.

'Yes, papa. What is it?' the little son answered, raising his big chestnut eyes, shining with good temper, to his father.

'What are you cutting out?'

'I am cutting out soldiers.'

'Are they handsome ones?'

'Yes, they are lovely.'

'Come and give me a kiss.'

The child got up at once. He was tall for his age, but thin—thin, like his father. He came up and held out his arms to embrace him; then, letting go, he leant his head against his knee as if he wanted to sleep. The little white face settled there as lightly as a flower.

'Is he ill?' Captain Gigli asked his wife.

'No, he is not,' she said at once.

'Send him outside,' he suggested. 'Why does he not go out every day? Gennaro Campanile set Mario's perambulator right, did he not?'

'Yes, he did,' she said in a faint voice.

'And has he brought the bookshelf he was to have had ready some days ago?'

'Yes, he has brought it.'

'I do not see it.'

'Grazietta and I were not strong enough to lift it and hang it on the wall. We are not a bit strong,' she added, with a sickly smile.

'You might let Gennaro Campanile do it; he is quite strong and fit. He made the shelf; he can put it in its place.'

His wife looked intently at him, and a pink flush rose to her forehead. He, too, gazed at her, not understanding what she meant.

'We will try to put it up ourselves,' she muttered then, as if she was mortified at his forgetfulness and her blush.

'You will tire yourself uselessly, girl,' said her husband, with fatherly good-nature. 'Send for Gennaro Campanile this very day. He will come at once and put up the shelf—there, to the right.'

'No, no,' she said hurriedly; 'I prefer to tire myself.'

He gazed at her, now making out her meaning, and a sadness came over his loving face.

'You dislike having a convict in the house?' he then asked slowly.

She turned beseeching eyes to him, as if asking pardon for this abhorrence.

'They are always coming about,' the young woman murmured in a feeble voice.

'Do they give you a shudder?'

'Yes; I can't bear them,' she said still more feebly.

'You are not very charitable,' he said, making an attempt to speak harshly to her.

'I acknowledge that I am not,' she replied, putting down her head, quite ashamed.

'They are men and fellow Christians, Cecilia.'

'They have robbed and committed murder.'

'They are men and fellow Christians,' he repeated firmly.

She said no more. She sewed feverishly, to hide the trembling of her hands, and a slight pink like a flame burned her cheek. The child, during that silence, raised his little head and gazed at his father and mother, then stretched out his arms to pull his father's head towards him to kiss him.

'Do you hate the convicts, too?' the father asked, feeling moved suddenly, and petting the child's head.

His little son looked at him innocently; he did not understand the question.

'The convicts are unhappy fellows,' his father said in a whisper.

'They are unhappy fellows,' the child repeated in a compassionate tone.

Now Captain Gigli folded the newspaper and shut it up, putting it back in its place methodically, for everyone who leads an isolated, monotonous life gets to be methodical. He took a brush to dust his coat; it was time to go to his office. The child stolidly followed him about. He came up to his wife to kiss her, and she said to him hurriedly:

'Tell Gennaro Campanile to come, then. Send him at once—about the shelf.'

'No, no; if you don't like it, my dear,' he said, petting her as if she were his daughter.

'I don't mind it—I assure you I don't mind,' Cecilia replied, putting a great restraint on herself.

'Leave it alone—leave it alone; it does not signify.'

'I will go out; I will go over the island with Mario, so only Grazietta will see him.'

'That will be all right,' he said, as he went off.

But when her good, loving husband had gone off to his tiresome duty, again to live, an honest clean man, among these thieves and murderers, she bent her head over her child's, bathing his neck with her tears. She rarely wept, only shed a few burning tears. She had started bravely enough on her life as wife and mother, amid these queer surroundings, where deep solitude was varied by throngs of scoundrels. She was a poor girl, an orphan, with no dower, who lived with an old aunt and worked at home, earning her own living barely enough. Captain Gigli had married her for herself out of loving compassion, for he had a large heart.

Had she not known that she was coming to live in an island amongst convicts? She knew it, she had agreed to it, thinking she would be isolated from them, and brought nearer to that good generous man, who would make up to her for everything. She had a woman's delicate, sensitive temperament, influenced instantaneously by sorrow or tenderness; but there was a spiritual force in her soul also, the strength good simple minds have. She had come to

the island with child, near her last month, and she shut herself up in the house at once to avoid sights that made her shudder. But no closing of doors and windows had failed to shut out the nocturnal voices of the watching sentinels. How many sleepless nights did she have, hearing that long, long challenge repeated every quarter of an hour, insistent, continuous, unfailing!

In the small house that she had decorated in a simple style she sat in the evening hours, stretching her ears, listening to the murmuring of the sea; then she could think she was on an island, on the lovely island she really lived in, between sky and sea, among flowers growing on the green slopes, and perfumes rising from the shore; but an insistent, implacable voice scattered her dream, telling her: 'Take care, this is a prison!'

What nights she had! While Captain Gigli slept placidly, taking the rest of a man who has worked hard, she lay awake with open eyes waiting for the sentinel's call, gazing at the feeble light of a lamp, which sketched out the most frightful visions for her. It was on one of these long, long nights that little Mario was born, a fragile little son, who had all her delicacy of constitution, and by his pallor showed traces of the nightmare—the nocturnal terrors she had gone through. A part of the poetry that a son brings into the house was lost; the little one was born in a prison, a place of penal servitude, among

convicts. When his mother caught him up to kiss him, there was something desolate in her kisses; she seemed to want to make up to him for that sad recollection, for this sorrowful stain! Vainly, vainly she tried to isolate herself; she could find no means of avoiding contact with the convicts, for her son, or herself.

The cradle Mario slept in had come out of the carpenter's workshop that these unhappy men were employed in; his first shoes, the blessed first shoes that make every mother's heart quiver with tenderness, had come from a convict boot factory. What could be done? The captain had not a large salary; he could not always be sending to Naples, and goods from the factory cost at least a third less than in Naples. She, out of delicacy, with great care, tried to hide her repulsion, depression and fears. When, from behind the window, she smiled on her husband leaving the house, and saw him at once surrounded by convicts—a group come to make some appeal—she got a pain at her heart; she pressed her son in her arms convulsively. The convicts were looking the Governor in the face anxiously, begging some favour from him. They knew that he was the best of them all; he was cold but gentle, severe but never cruel. However, she read threats and anger in these eyes. Alas! nothing would ever convince her that the men had lost the habit of shedding blood; she would not be persuaded that they had no

knives up their sleeves. She never let her child go out with Grazietta—never. She always thought that in revenge for being shut up there—from an animal thirst for blood, an instinct for murder—one of these assassins would kill him one day. She used to go out, carrying him in her arms like a humble woman of the people, without feeling the fatigue, and when she met a convict she cast down her eyes. They bowed to her, pulling off their caps, stopping to look at the pretty little fellow, yielding to the sweet paternal instinct that is in the heart of the greatest scoundrels. But she hurried on, frightened, almost running off with the child. One convict she was always meeting on the road was a great, robust young fellow, with a colourless face, very womanly blue eyes, and red hair: she was always meeting this life-sentenced man in a red cap. It seemed almost as if he waited for the young mother and child—that tall convict, with the gentle eyes; and when she passed, gazed and gazed, standing still, until she had turned the corner of the long road.

Time went by; she managed to subdue her fears, but never to conquer them. Fragile and pensive, she gently tried to get over her low spirits, and her husband always found her affectionate and patient at home. She was ashamed to own to her disgust, ashamed of her fears; she feared it was a reproach to the good, generous man who had taken her out of wretchedness, from an uncertain future, only to cast

her into prison. He got a glimpse of this feeling of repulsion sometimes, and tried to conquer it; he was grieved, and had a vague feeling of remorse. So his wife's heart closed as if it was smothered.

Only sometimes Cecilia was struck by a vague remorse. She really was a very good woman, religiously devoted to her duty, compassionate of all wickedness, and when she managed to subdue her repulsion and fears she called herself to account for her own injustice and cruelty. Convicts were human creatures as well as herself; her husband often told her so. He had a just heart, though he was severe with them; he told her gently this truth: that they were men and Christians, perhaps more unlucky than guilty. Full of grief and repentance, Cecilia made up her mind to bear the sight of them calmly when walking on the island, and to bow to them when they took off their caps. For a short time, alas!—only for a short time! If on the leafy slopes, where she set her baby down to pick daisies with his innocent fingers, she got enchanted, gazing at the stretch of sea, whilst Mario now and then gave a happy shriek, because he had caught an insect—if in that dreamy forgetfulness a man suddenly appeared dressed in brick-red, dragging heavily a thick chain, she kept down a frightened shriek at being brusquely drawn out of her peaceful dreams; she grew pale, as in fear of death, and took the boy hurriedly from the ground to carry him off. That

countryside, the sea, the flowers, the whole landscape, branded all of a sudden by the presence of an assassin, made her shudder. What was to be done? It was stronger than herself. Only in her husband's presence, as much as she could, she held in her feelings, knowing that she was ungrateful—that she indirectly insulted him. She respected him as the very model of justice and goodness, but she was a poor weak woman, with no courage, imprisoned, shut up on that island, in that land of shame, sorrow, and punishment, where everything was spoilt by the terrible society—country and home, both her wifely and maternal love.

But just that day she was more full of remorse than ever. In regard to her husband she had been ungrateful, almost reproaching him with his kindness to her. He had spoken, not harshly, but seriously. How much better he was than herself! Her few burning tears—tears of repentance—had wet her baby's neck, and he, accustomed to these lonely outbursts of his mother's, and himself a fragile, melancholy child, went on saying in a whisper, petting her with his cool little fingers:

'Don't cry, mamma—don't cry!'

'No, I am not crying,' said she, drying her eyes and getting up. 'Now mother will take Mario out walking.'

'Take me in the go-cart, mother—in the go-cart!' shouted the child, catching hold of Cecilia's petticoats.

'Yes, dear, in the go-cart,' she repeated, keeping back a sigh.

For it was a rough child's perambulator, made coarsely by convict joiners and smiths, with more iron than wood in it, and noisy, like the chains they wore joined to the ankle and belt—a cart that was heavy and difficult to push, going crooked every moment. When he was in it, little Mario was so happy he never wanted to get out again; he was thin, rather weak on the legs, and was delighted to lie on the cushions that his mother had stuffed herself to make them soft. He was happy, getting himself taken along in the cart for whole hours, all over the large island, half shutting his eyes, slumbering in the felt hood which kept his ears warm. The mother, being delicate, got tired after a little, but baby wakened at once from his half-sleep, and shouted:

'Push, mother—push!'

'Wait a moment, Mario,' she said, breathing deeply.

She stood leaning her hands on the iron bar, resting; but at once, in a beseeching tone, the baby began again:

'Push, mother—push; please do!'

She set on her way again courageously, without a sigh. She never would have dared to send Mario out alone in the go-cart with Grazietta the servant, and it was impossible for both to go with him. Work had to be done in the house; also she was

rather afraid to leave it empty. So that day, as on many others, she had the heavy cart carried down the steps in front of the door, where the child got into it with a merry leap, and threw himself down, full of delight. His mother put on cape and gloves, and threw a rug over the child's knees. Grazietta, a maidservant of forty, a silent woman, stood looking on.

'Gennaro Campanile is coming to put up the bookshelf,' said her mistress, with an effort. 'Be careful; keep watch!'

The woman gave a slight smile; she knew her mistress's fears. Grazietta was a convict's wife; he had slain a man in a brawl; and, quietly faithful, she had followed him everywhere, from Portolongo to Ischia, from there to Nisida, making unheard-of efforts to take service in the same island, and always managing it in some queer way, by a miracle of strong will and obstinacy. So whatever she earned she made use of to give to her husband. Thus two-thirds of her food went to him, and this sacrifice was carried out silently, almost in an underhand way, she was so much afraid of being sent away from the island. The convict, a black-visaged man with a ferocious air, came cautiously to the kitchen-grating, carried off a covered plate of bread and fruit, and went off into a corner to devour it greedily. She came in from him quite happy, content almost to fast herself; and when her mistress, involuntarily,

showed her fear of the convicts, Grazietta shook her head. As a woman of experience, she pitied the lady's timid youth, being convinced that murderers were unlucky and not guilty—convinced that the misfortune might happen to anyone.

'Where do you wish to go?' Cecilia asked the child before starting.

'Over there—there,' said he, pointing in front of him.

The Nisida roads were as broad as any in a small town, with levelled pavements, shaded here and there by acacia-trees, which in October were still green. The houses—abodes of officials, contractors, heads of workshops, and warders—of one or two stories high, had a pretty appearance, like coquettish country nests; the great body of the general prison —dormitories, dining-halls, galleries, infirmaries, prisons—stood in the middle, tall and dark, like a rock overshadowing all these villas. Sometimes in a bend of the road that surrounds Nisida, among the houses and trees, there was a long view of the sunny sea—a fresh, smiling vision. The little boy stretched out in the go-cart opened his eyes wide, almost laughing, and muttered vaguely:

'Go there . . . there.'

His mother pushed the perambulator slowly; she was seized by an overwhelming nervous excitement. She bowed mechanically to some official's wife, a contractor's daughter, and passed on, still slowly,

gazing at the sea, which was her child's dream too. Sometimes a soldier passed, or some convicts—the ones that could go about freely. She acknowledged their greetings, bending her head a little; the child touched his cap and smiled. But just at one place her faintness overpowered her; she had to let go the handle of the cart, and sit down on a stone seat, nearly fainting. It was an almost deserted place where the houses ended and the country part of Nisida began. The child looked at his mother, seeing her so pale and her eyes half shut; he hardly dared to murmur in rather a cowed and frightened way:

'Push, mamma—push the cart!'

'In a little,' she said in a low voice; it was like a sigh, and Mario did not hear her.

'My lady, may I wheel the go-cart?' said a humble but manly voice.

Where had that convict with the fair complexion and gentle blue eyes come from so suddenly? What was he asking? What did he want? She looked at him in a dreamy way, frightened, as if he were a ghost.

'Your little boy is heavy,' muttered the convict, still more humbly, 'and so is the go-cart. My lady, I can wheel it.'

She understood then. Getting pallid again, with lips pressed together, she said:

'No, you may not.'

He looked at her, said nothing for a minute, then began again humbly but obstinately:

'It is not work for your hands. Let me carry the little chap.'

'No, you are not to,' she said again angrily.

'Please forgive my boldness; I could carry him without tiring him. Don't be afraid,' he ended up by saying, in such a gentle voice it seemed full of tears.

'I am not afraid of anything,' she said dryly, getting up; 'but I don't want you to carry my child.'

She got up resolutely, beginning again with a heroic struggle to wheel the go-cart. He gave his arm a wave, which made the chain hanging from his waist clatter disagreeably; but he said nothing, watching the mother and child go off. She was still quivering with anger, as if the very humility with which the convict had offered his services was an insult to her. Now they were right in the country, in a lane among fields, where two or three officers' horses came to graze among the cart-horses used for bringing up provisions from the shore.

'Mother,' said the baby reflectively.

'What is it, dear, that you wish?'

'Why did you say "No" to that convict?'

'Just because I chose to.'

The child said no more; he felt that his mother's voice was troubled.

'Now you are tired of wheeling me, mother,' he remarked in a little.

'No, dear, I am not.'

'Lift me out, mother; put me down.'

'Stay in the cart, dear—stay in it. We are going further on; I will take a rest then.'

They went on a bit, still in silence; they had passed already two or three sentry-boxes. The baby always looked at the soldiers, and smiled to them.

'Mamma,' he said again.

'What is it, dear?'

'That convict wanted to carry me about, far away —you know.'

'Yes, yes, I know.'

'He is an unhappy fellow,' Mario remarked, looking her in the face.

'Who said that to you?'

'Father told me,' he replied triumphantly.

She held down her head, without making any remark.

'Are the soldiers unhappy fellows, too, mother?' asked the baby, after thinking it over.

'The soldiers are honest men,' she answered quickly.

'So,' said the little one, 'convicts are unhappy fellows and soldiers are honest men. What am I, mother? Am I a little chap?'

'You are my dear little boy,' she said, embracing and kissing him tenderly.

They had come to quite a green field, fresh and full of flowers; a little wall that rose half a man's height divided it from the other field at the side. Cecilia stopped, utterly tired, and sank down to sit on the grass. The baby looked at the grass, flowers, and sea, as if he were thinking: he was too thoughtful and solemn for his age. A sharp scent of flowers was in the air—these roses that grow in the four seasons, they bud in a day, and live passionately for one day only—also a smell of mint, the most common wild herb in Nisida.

Cecilia recovered from her weariness, while the child in the cart half slumbered.

'What a scent of flowers!' she said, as if to herself.

There were some in the field they were in, but there must have been more in the field alongside which the wall kept them out of; perhaps it was a garden, as a partition had been put up. Taken with curiosity, she got up. To her first of all astonished, then frightened, eyes a sight, sad at first, then terrible, appeared. It was a great sloping field, badly enclosed by a little wall of building material, thrown over here and there and become a heap of rubbish, eaten into by weeds that had taken root in it, corroded by the rain, beaten down by the wind—in short, a miserable barrier that no longer prevented men or animals from getting in, and perhaps no longer marked the limits of the field. The grass was growing in irregular tufts on curiously uneven ground;

it swelled out in places and fell in again in waves, like the sea in a storm; among the grass grew the perennial rose, but the summer poppies were over, only the black crackling berry of the soporific was left on the thin stem. There was a sharp perfume of wild flowers, weeds, and roses — the strong smell neglected fields have where no one goes for months and years, where vegetation gets soured and spreads out in a solitary way, dying, coming to life again, dying down, free, forgotten, neglected, accursed perhaps. Cecilia gazed at it with astonished eyes; she searched well and better, trying to understand the mystery of that field, so curiously moved about, like sea waves, surrounded by a wall, but still abandoned by men. She saw, noticed, that at every little distance, at four or five points in the deserted field, stood a small wooden cross that had once been black, but time and rough weather had discoloured and twisted it. A dirty yellow card was tied to some of these crosses, on which, written by hand, in large, ill-formed characters, were two initials and a cipher— the one the dead had carried about in life, the cipher man's justice had assigned him instead of a name.

The crosses seemed thrown down pell-mell, as if by the wind's caprice or man's forgetfulness; perhaps, having once fallen down, and been found on the ground, they were put up again by chance, where the body they ought to have covered with their little sacred shadow no longer existed perhaps.

But Cecilia was still looking, as if a secret presentiment of grief and terror told her there was still something to be seen. Looking intently, she saw —saw distinctly—among the yellow earth and green grass, white as a bit of ivory, some human bones. Carelessly buried, slightly covered with earth over the ill-made coffins, by the natural movement of the ground bearing increase, by the frightful motion of decomposition, the dead were coming out anew on the earth, and their white bones sparkled in the sun. The convicts' graveyard had no sexton. Beside the fragrant odour of wild thyme, the big roses with falling petals, these queer human sprouts came up; no merciful spade put them back again in the ground. She saw them in every direction; so all-powerful, they seemed to have pierced through the ground forcibly; so overflowing, the fearful eye dreaded to see the entire outlined skeleton rising from the ground.

Cecilia gazed with wide-open eyes at this horrid vegetation of dead folk, on this chastisement of the world's, that smites even after death, that does not allow a murderer's corpse even the mercy of a deep grave, the care any other corpse gets; denies even the last repose to bones that are bare of flesh. The convicts' graveyard did not even have the care of a convict gardener; the corpse was put in hastily, enclosed in four unconnected planks; no one came to work or to pray there; the dead came out as if

these prisoners' bones had kept a final, bitter longing for liberty.

Cecilia, besides feeling the most agonizing pity, had a frightful vision in that solitude of herself, her husband and child being dead and buried in that field, that seemed accursed by God and man—buried without compassion or proper care, amid wild vegetation, in that land beaten on by sun and wind. She had a vision of three neglected corpses rising up again, bringing their bones to light amongst those of thieves and murderers. A loud cry of grief and fear formed in her breast, but it did not come out; it was choked; and she fell down, like lead, along the wall, her face in the grass.

When she started up and opened her eyes, amid the great silence, she only heard a rustling. Her infant was still lying in his go-cart, but his eyes were open and he was smiling all over at that great tall convict with the red hair and fair complexion, who was lying on the grass, fanning him with a big vine-leaf for coolness and to keep off the flies. As the vine-leaf passed, the little boy half shut his eyes and opened them again, giving a silent giggle. Twice looking at his mother, lying at full length, he said:

'Hush! mother is sleeping.'

So the convict shook the vine-leaf more gently over the baby's face, not to make a noise. That great body, dressed in reddish linen, stretched on the grass, looked as if it belonged to a good-natured

childish giant. Further away, among the flowers, was thrown his red cap that bore the figures 417; it looked like a poppy—a big, late poppy.

Cecilia felt nothing but great weariness when she woke; she leant on her elbow and looked at her son and the convict without anger or fear. Rocco Traetta got to his feet and stood embarrassed, rolling the vine-leaf between his fingers. The remembrance of what she had seen came back to her entirely, but without making her tremble; only a slight quiver came over her flesh.

'Let us go on,' she said, getting up.

And with a gentle air she pointed at the go-cart to Rocco. He picked up his hat quickly and began to wheel the cart joyfully. She came behind, weakly letting herself go. She was conquered, subdued.

III

SLOWLY, speaking to each other in a low voice, Captain Gigli, Governor of the Royal Penal Establishment of Nisida, and the Royal Inspector of Prisons, Signor Colonna, were going over the island roads that November mid-day. The inspector was staying at Nisida for three or four days, living in the Governor's own house. He was a Piedmontese of about fifty, very methodical and scrupulous. He carried out his work rather in a bureaucratic way, asking very minutely about everything, wanting to discuss everything, analyzing the smallest things. Gentle and patient, submissive to a will-power he deeply respected, Captain Gigli never left the inspector, giving him all the information and explanations he required, providing him with registers and accounts, so that his report on Nisida should be a complete bit of work.

'Taking things generally, you seem to me to be satisfied,' the inspector remarked in his guttural tone of voice, that was pleasing enough, too.

'Fairly so, sir. Everything seems easier if you put your heart in it.'

'You are quite content to stay here, then ?'

'As long as they leave me here,' he muttered rather vaguely.

'I think that your wife is not so well satisfied to be here,' Colonna remarked.

'That is the case, poor thing,' replied Gigli, with a softening of his voice. 'She is rather delicate in health and fanciful. To begin with, she found the surroundings unbearable.'

'Is she accustomed to them now?'

'She is, rather, I think. Of course, it is impossible I could make a change in a naturally melancholy temperament. Now she seems to me sadder; but she is resigned, poor girl! She is very good-hearted.'

'Perhaps she should be sent to Naples,' the inspector remarked, without taking notice of the words which showed emotion.

'My means will not allow of it,' Captain Gigli said shortly.

They said no more. They had come to a little square where a new building was springing up, erected by the convicts themselves. They were going and coming, carrying pails of lime, bending under stones, climbing the ladders quickly.

'Do they work willingly?' Colonna asked.

'Not all of them. I have about fifty men, the most ungovernable and dangerous ones, that I have found it impossible to get any work out of.'

'Did you make use of coercion?'

'I did. It made them more bitter, but it did not subdue them.'

'What can be the reason of that? Can you think of any cause?'

'They are the prisoners that have always led a vagabond life, living off theft and rapine. For them work is an intolerable thing. I will call up one of them.' Turning to a convict sitting on a stone munching a bit of bread, he called to him: 'Calamà!'

He did not turn round, not even at the second call.

Gigli repressed an impatient shrug.

'Ingannalamorte' (Cheat death).

Then the convict got up. He was little and fat, with a protruding stomach and mean, short legs; his head was big, his nose flat, and his hair like the bristles of a brush, standing straight up from the forehead; his eyes were colourless. He kept his cap on, and went on eating, not at all put out by Gigli and the inspector's presence.

'What is your name?' the inspector asked in a severe tone.

'Ingannalamorte,' the convict said in a hoarse voice.

'Have you no other name?'

'The other is of no account,' said he contemptuously.

'How is it that you will not work?'

'Ingannalamorte never has worked!'

'However, the law sentenced you to hard labour.'

'The law can force me to stay here—that can't be helped. But it must come to an end, by God!'

'Do not blaspheme. You are bound to work.'

'To stay here is all right; I can't avoid it. I have to carry this chain, too; it is the watch that Vittorio makes us a present of. But wear myself out, by Gad!—no, never!'

This was said with sulky energy.

'It might get you good marks if you worked,' said Colonna.

'What is the use of good marks? I still have twenty years to serve. But who knows if I will do it all?' he added in a challenging tone.

'How so?'

'Oh, so many things may happen! I may die; I might escape, too.'

'There is no escaping from Nisida,' Captain Gigli said to him, very gently, but firmly.

'Men do escape,' said the convict triumphantly—'or one may die. But you know, sir, one did escape.'

The inspector questioned the Governor with a look. He gave an assenting glance.

'Only one, of course,' the haughty convict went on; 'but where one gets through, so can another. It all depends on not being carrion, as they all are here—on making a great leap. And then, will this law always last? Will this Government last?'

'That is enough!' said the inspector severely.

The man shrugged his shoulders, and went off.

'He is ungovernable—quite,' said Captain Gigli. 'I have at least fifty like that.'

'Have they never risen in revolt?'

'Once they did.'

'Once only, was it?'

'They all think themselves great men; they scorn the law and the sentence passed on them; and among them everyone wants to take the lead, so that they do not easily agree to act together. That gives me a weapon against them.'

'Still, they did rise in revolt?'

'Yes, they did.'

'Was the revolt put down at once?'

'No, it was not.'

'Did anything happen?'

'I was wounded by a stone on the head.'

'You went down among the mutineers, then?'

'Yes; it was my work,' Captain Gigli said simply.

'How did you induce them to submit?'

'I spoke to them; I let them speak. They wished to see their families oftener—once a month instead of every two months. It was a just request, so I granted it.'

'You did right. Do their families come often?'

'Very seldom, and very few of them at all. There are convicts belonging to far-off provinces who never have a visitor; others, Naples men, see their people every six months; some committed murder in their own family, so no one comes, of course. There is

Rocco Traetta, called Sciurillo, who killed his father; he is a well-behaved young man; he is always writing to his mother, entreating her to come and see him. His letters go through my hands; sometimes they are heartrending.'

'Has his mother ever come?'

'No, never. She has not even answered the convict's letters.'

'That is natural,' said the stern Piedmontese.

'Who knows?' said Gigli thoughtfully. 'Mothers are so queer, and unnatural sometimes in their maternal love. I, too, thought for a time that she would come. Her son still thinks so; he supposes that his letters have gone astray, or that his mother has to work and can't come; that she has no money to get to Nisida, or that she is just on the point of coming.'

'Does Traetta tell you all that?'

'He tells my child,' replied Gigli, smiling.

'What! he tells your child?'

'Yes; Traetta is always about him, with the fidelity and love that big dogs have for children.'

'Do you leave your child with him?'

'Yes; I think it is always better to treat them as men and Christians. Who can do harm to an innocent child? The baby, too, gets more humane; it is a way of making him courageous.'

'You have queer notions,' the inspector observed, with an incredulous smile.

They had got to a door of the great prison building; they had to visit the infirmary, which was on the last floor. As they were going up, they still met convicts, holding tumblers and plates.

'I appoint them to serve the sick in the little hospital.'

'Do you think that is a good plan?'

'They understand each other better. The continual presence of the warders exasperates the quietest. With the sick I try to avoid it.'

'You will have lots of sham invalids.'

'Very often; but it is a sham easy to detect.'

The convicts' hospital consisted of one single large room, with four big windows opening on to the sea; the floor was of beaten earth, very black; the walls simply whitewashed; but the beds were more comfortable than the ones that the healthy men had; there was not the usual sack with blue and white lines, swollen out with rustling maize leaves, but a thin woollen mattress and not such coarse sheets. Eight or ten convicts were lying sick, motionless, and silent in their beds, gazing at the sea, which could be seen from all the windows, with rather dreamy eyes. One of them, a scraggy, yellowish man, called the Governor in a feeble voice.

'Sir, why do you not do me the kindness of ordering a bit of meat for me? I have not eaten any for such a long time!'

'You will get it if the doctor orders it.'

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'Do me another favour. Have me placed opposite the sea, so that I can see it; my back is turned to it, and I feel an oppression—a weighing on me.'

He complained in a thin little voice, groaning and sighing, repeating his requests, repeating the words, shaking his lean head. The other sick men, who were saying nothing, looked at him with rather astonished, bored eyes. The inspector, saying nothing, wandered round the beds, looking at everything, while the whimpering convict still asked for something, insistently.

'Not to be able even to smoke a pipe with this fine sea air, to digest these four beans they give us!'

'Have you no tobacco?' Captain Gigli asked him, with fine patience.

'Who would give it to me—who will give it to me, poor chap? If I had even that good soul, my wife, she would think of sending me some sous!'

'If you behave well—if you don't complain, as you do, from morning to night, whether you are well or ill—I will buy some tobacco for you.'

'Have I not good reason to complain, sir?' the convict went on groaning. 'You are kind, that can't be denied; but does this seem a life for a Christian? And then, this chain that we can never take off—never, even when the Lord chastens us by making us ill! This chain, this chain! Would that an angel might come and take it from me!'

He was still groaning, but when he mentioned the

chain a deep sigh came from all these breasts that had the cold contact of the iron against their flesh.

'He is very tiresome,' said Captain Gigli, 'but he is always ill; I give him some privileges because of that.'

'Did his wife die when he was here?' asked the inspector, as they were going downstairs on their way out.

'He killed her himself. He was a snow-seller of Caserta—they call him Ciccio, the snow-man. To break the lump of snow, these people use a broad, thin-edged hatchet, with which they strike, giving frequent blows. It was with that he nearly cut off his wife's head.'

'Was it out of jealousy?'

'Yes, of a corporal. He was arrested at once. When he heard she was dead he wept like a child. Here, too, he cries sometimes, and shouts out that he would have done better to forgive her; that he does forgive her; that he would like to bring her to life, and always keep together.'

'He must be an awful bore,' remarked the inspector, as they took the road for returning to the controlling offices again.

They were silent, walking slowly. A great twilight calm was around them. The grayish November day was wearing away to its last hours.

'What a lot of windows looking on to the sea!' said Colonna, as if speaking to himself; 'the whole

island seems so easy to land at and get away from. How is it that the convicts don't think of escape?'

'They all do think of it,' said Gaptain Gigli in a low voice; 'the quietest, most industrious, indifferent, the most absent-minded and hypocritical, think of it constantly. You understand, they feel as if they were free, for I let them go and come; they wander about everywhere. You always find some of them rapt up gazing at the sea, and I guess from their absorption and drawing their eyebrows together that they are calculating the distance in their minds, the depth of the water, how far it is to Bagnoli, how far to Procida.'

'Still, the island seems little guarded.'

'It may seem so,' said the Governor, smiling; 'but come and look at the height of it.' And guiding him, after crossing two streets, he led him to the very edge. The height of it made one dizzy; the sea beneath seemed an abyss. 'It is like that all round and round,' he said, 'and every hundred paces there is a sentinel, night and day. At night more are put on. Every quarter of an hour they challenge each other. Running away seems the easiest thing in the world to these unhappy fellows till they get to the edge; there they have to throw themselves down into the sea. They are too much afraid to leap. Once one was found in a swoon in the grass.'

'Still, flight has been attempted?'

'Yes, there have been eight or ten of them who

have tried it, of whom at least half were caught by the sentinel before they threw themselves down; the other four carried it out to the very end, but there was only one who was successful.'

'Was he not caught?'

'No; he was a Naples sailor, of Santa Lucia, of the kind who from their childhood go to the bottom of the sea to pick up bits of money—even sous. They are divers from infancy, called *sommozzatori*. We never got him again. He must have gone to some foreign country on a merchant ship, and stayed there.'

'What about the other three?'

'All of them were killed. A sentinel told me that the cry he heard, as one of them went down, was so agonizing, he knew at once that the man escaping was dead. In fact, we have always found them next day dead on the rocks.'

'That would be a healthy example for the others.'

'We brought up the smashed bodies, which caused great horror. But what does it matter? they are always dreaming about making their escape. What we oppose to it is just the fear of death. They have a horror of dying here in the prison, all of them. I must say that our cemetery gives one a shudder. In spite of all my efforts, I have not found a convict—I have not induced either a convict or a soldier to take charge of the little graveyard. The wall has fallen in most places; not one of the bricklayer

convicts will set it up again. I punished them, but it was no use. It gives the soldiers a shudder, too. They are in low spirits, at any rate, from the gaoler's life they lead here; I do not want to oblige them to do sadder work. I would like to be authorized by my superiors to go to the expense of a cemetery-keeper—any sort of peasant; but I never get a reply to my letters on this subject. I assure you, sir, that the very sight of this frightful graveyard makes the convict's slightest wish of running away pass for a time. You ought to interest yourself about it in your report.'

'I will see—I will see,' replied Colonna vaguely.

On the house balcony, whence, between two buildings opposite, one saw a corner of the sea, they had spread a linen awning carefully to shelter it from sun and damp. When little Mario was taken at times with the great indolence that came from weakness, when he refused everything, and would not play, walk, sleep, or go in the perambulator, and got buried in melancholy, taciturn ponderings over things that not even his mother could make out, then they carried him in his easy-chair, with his toys and book of pictures, on to the balcony, where striped carnations, heartsease, flaming red geraniums, sweet-smelling marjoram and sweet basil bloomed in pots. They could leave the child alone, too, on the balcony for whole hours; he did not call for anyone.

He kept quiet, turning over now and then, with a white, almost transparent, hand, his book of pictures, or sat looking at the sea, dumb and motionless.

His pallid mother stared then, with uneasy eyes, at her low-spirited infant, and sometimes, seized by a strange fright, she came to kneel in front of his chair, surrounding him with her loving motherly arms, and questioned him anxiously.

'What is the matter with you?'

'I have nothing the matter with me, mother.'

'Do you feel ill?'

'No, mother, I do not.'

'Really, do you not feel ill?'

'Not a bit, mother,' replied the little fellow, smiling with angelic patience, like a big, wise, loving lad.

'Are you pleased, Mario?'

'Yes, I am, quite.'

'You would like to go to Naples, would you not?'

'Yes, I would, mother.'

'Oh, my darling—my darling!' she said, kissing him despairingly.

'But it is nice here, too—here as well,' the child repeated, embracing his mother, and leaning his cheek on her shoulder.

'Poor darling! poor dear!'—as if a great grief for the child was wringing her heart.

'It is very nice here,' he said mechanically, like a good, reasonable lad that does not want to put anyone about.

But his mother was not quite convinced. Every time that she saw her son pallid and silent a sharp grief went through her; she always thought: 'It is the prison, the fault of the prison.' No, no, nothing could prevent her from dwelling on this frightful thought. Her youth, gaiety, her withered illusions were gone for ever. She would never enjoy again a single hour of giddy happiness, the great simple time that is granted to the humblest destinies, the hour of fervent youth. But what did it matter about herself now? Her agony was for that little son, a delicate flower born in a convict atmosphere, growing up amidst that cruel endless tragedy of hundreds of chained men; a poor flower, for ever blighted by a poisonous atmosphere. Of course, the child guessed it; his melancholy, so sad in a child, the blight on his health, was caused by that. 'It is the gaol,' the mother thought to herself. Still, as the father wished it, as the child himself sometimes was amused by him, she allowed Rocco Traetta to wheel the go-cart, to keep the child company on the balcony, and try to mend his broken toys. Silent and humble, Rocco Traetta slid through the house, keeping the chain tight against his leg not to let it chink, taking up as little room as possible, keeping out of Cecilia's way, for he could feel her dislike. He always went after the child like a shadow, gazing in his eyes so fixedly and tenderly, his glance was like a woman's—a mother's. Every day he came to

the Governor's house and stood at the door, without going in or knocking, waiting like a dog that is to have a bone thrown to him, but dare not ask for it, having to trust to man's merciful remembrance. Sometimes Grazietta passed and told him:

'Come in.'

Sometimes no one went by, and he stood an hour there, stiff as a statue. He was very happy when Cecilia, going on to the balcony, saw him, and, knowing that he had been there some time, said, keeping down her natural dislike to him:

'Come up, then.'

That strong young fellow's imploring glance, asking dumbly, as a favour, to see the little one, to be allowed to stay beside him, affected her. When he got the word, he reddened with delight, went up quickly, making no noise, and passed by her, with his cap off and eyes down. He went to find the child at once, and held him up in the air, which set him chattering. They spent hours out on that balcony. The convict sat on the ground, the chain lying across his knees, and a queer conversation took place between Mario and Rocco Traetta, with long silences between.

'Who made that dress for you, Sciurillo?'

'It was Government.'

'Did you get the cap, too?'

'Yes, sir, I did.'

'Government is very kind,' said the boy.

The convict looked at him, but said nothing. If the boy had said in full daylight that it was night, he would have said, 'Yes, it is dark.'

Then, after a little, the child began again:

'What did they give you to eat, Sciurillo?'

'Bean broth, sir.'

'What was the second dish?'

'Just bean broth.'

'What had you for fruit?'

'I had beans,' said the convict, laughing.

Then they both laughed.

The boy suddenly got thoughtful.

'I had macaroni, Sciurillo,' he said reflectively.

'May it do you good, sir!' said Sciurillo, laughing.

'Do you like macaroni?'

'Yes, I do.'

'The next time I will eat less of it; I will keep a plateful for you.'

'It does not signify, sir,' said the convict, quite touched.

'Yes, yes, you will have to eat it,' shouted Mario, rather in a rage.

'Yes, sir—yes, sir—don't get angry,' Rocco Traetta answered at once in alarm.

The child, in a fretting way, turned over his picture-book.

'Read what is written under there,' he said to Sciurillo, pointing out a sentence under a little figure.

'Do you not know how to read? How stupid you are!'

'If I could read, I would not be here,' said Rocco Traetta sadly, after thinking a time.

'You are here because you are a scoundrel,' said the child, laughing.

'Yes, sir,' muttered the convict. 'But those who know how to read don't go to gaol.'

'You are a scoundrel, that is why you were put in gaol,' Mario insisted angrily.

'Yes, sir—yes, sir,' Sciurillo murmured meekly.

They said no more. The boy looked at the striped carnations which were still flowering, in spite of it being November; the balcony was so much in the sun. A film of dust covered all the plants.

'Should I water them?' asked the convict, guessing the boy's thoughts, and getting up off the ground.

'Yes, but don't put much water on, Sciurillo.'

The convict, still with his silent bearing, slipped through the room, and went to the kitchen to fill the watering-pot.

'There are the copper pots to rub,' said Grazietta, who was glad to put off her work on the convict.

'In a little; young master wants me to water the flowers just now,' Sciurillo said patiently.

Out on the balcony he made the water shower gently on the rather burnt-up earth in the pots. The child followed the work with great attention.

'Water the leaves a little, Sciurillo.'

'Yes, sir, I will.'

A little water was left in the pot. Sciurillo threw it down on the balcony in a circle, to freshen it.

'Pull a carnation for me, Sciurillo.'

The convict broke off a carnation carefully, and handed it to Mario.

'I want to give this to mother,' said the boy thoughtfully.

'Do you, sir?'

'Go and take it to her.'

The convict looked at the child with an alarmed air.

'Go at once!' the boy commanded.

'Sir,' he said hesitatingly, 'why don't you give it yourself?'

'Why should I?'

'It would be better, you know, little sir, to give the carnation yourself. From you it gives pleasure, sir.'

His voice shook so much that even the child understood his emotion.

Mario looked at him fixedly.

'Your mother can't bear us,' said the convict, 'because we are all scoundrels. She is quite right,' he added very humbly.

'She is quite right,' replied the child. And, rising on his rather weak little legs, for they were so thin, he went into the house again, calling out: 'Mamma, mamma!'

A great chirrup of kisses followed, and the convict smiled to himself. Now he was taking the dry leaves off the plants, and thinking that Grazietta had told him to rub up the copper pots in the kitchen. But the child showed again at the balcony window; he came and threw himself down, with a tired air, on his easy-chair, and turned over the picture-book with slow fingers, his eyes vaguely staring as if he did not see. Then the book fell off his knees on to the ground; the convict ran to pick it up.

'I don't want it,' said the child, looking displeased.

'What is it that you want, sir?'

'I don't want anything,' said Mario, shaking his head.

'Do you wish me to tell you a story?'

'No; they are ugly ones.'

'Would you like me to sing you a song?'

'Yes, sing something,' said the baby, smiling.

So the convict began cheerfully:

'Si iesco da ccà dinto carcerato.'

He sang in a low voice, but cheerfully, the prisoner's threatening song: he wants to set fire and flame to everything when he gets out of prison.

'That is too cheerful. Sing me another one,' said Mario languidly.

So the convict very softly began again, singing a

sad old song, which he knew from the time he spent two years in San Francesco prison at Naples, waiting for his sentence—a sad, lengthy song, with a queer metre and fantastic rhymes:

'A San Francesco, Gia ssona la sveglia.'

He sang in a low voice, holding his knees with his hands, shaking his red-capped head. The boy listened, half shutting his eyes. He had twice or thrice nodded his head to the queer slow chant. The convict took up the verses again—the ode that invokes freedom. The child went to sleep. Rocco Traetta still sang on at the sad prison chant to lull an innocent child to sleep.

IV

ALL night Captain Gigli had been much agitated. His wife, a very light sleeper, who could never slumber deeply because of the sentinels' voices calling to each other every quarter of an hour, noticed at once that her husband was turning over and over in his bed, that he sighed sometimes like a man oppressed.

'Are you feeling ill?' she asked him two or three times, half opening her eyes in the darkness.

'No, no,' he said with eagerness; 'sleep quietly. I am all right; it is only I am not sleepy.'

She put down her head obediently, trying to go to sleep—to fall into the slight slumber of her shaken nerves; but, half asleep and half awake, she still made out that her husband was restless.

Captain Gigli got up very early in the morning, when it was hardly dawn, and said to his wife, who looked up at him with wide-open eyes, astonished:

'Sleep, sleep, poor darling! I am going to take a walk—a long walk.'

At dinner-hour he came back, looking rather pale; he was silent and nervous. He went up and down close to the window looking on to the road that

came up from the shore to Nisida, and gazed at the Bagnoli shore to see if any boat was coming off. Then he sat down to dinner, distracted and silent. At one time he asked:

'It is the sixth of November, is it not?'

'Yes, it is,' replied Cecilia.

'Why do you ask, father—why?' demanded the child, who always asked questions, obstinately, with a little boy's persistent curiosity, which shows intelligence in them.

'I will tell you later on, dear,' said his father, becoming silent again.

After dinner, about three o'clock, he had all the newspapers of the last few days brought, and he read them feverishly. But suddenly his agitation quieted down. A telegraph-boy from Naples came in, and handed Gigli a telegram. His hand shook as he opened it, so that Signora Gigli trembled too, with ignorant emotion, and she could hardly sign the receipt.

'There is the express and the boat to pay for,' said the telegraph-boy.

'How much is it?' asked Cecilia.

'Two francs and a half.'

She counted out the money, keeping an eye on her husband. Captain Gigli had got as pale as death. He kept his eyes fixed on the telegram, although he had finished reading it; he seemed turned to stone.

'There is your money,' said Signora Gigli.

'Give him five francs, Cecilia, and a glass of wine,' said Captain Gigli in such a changed voice it made his wife start. 'He has brought good news —very good news!'

Signora Gigli gave the money; then rang the bell to call Grazietta, who took the lad to the kitchen for the wine. Clinging to his father's knees, the child said:

'Father, give me the telegram; give it to me!'

'In a little—in a little,' said his father gently.

As soon as they were alone, Captain Gigli turned towards Cecilia solemnly, took her by the hand, and said slowly:

'Cecilia, this telegram brings great news, very important news. This morning Victor Emanuel made his entrance into Venice. Venice is ours; it is Italian!'

He said no more. He was a soldier; but his brown skin, dulled and hardened by sun and weather, was mortally pale; his proud eyes, that had looked cheerfully on fields of battle, were veiled with tears. His wife, admiring his good heart, courage, and most noble emotion, said nothing; she was very white herself.

'Venice is part of Italy,' Captain Gigli said again.

'Venice is part of Italy!' repeated the little one's small voice. His father lifted him up in his arms, and kissed him frantically.

'Venice is Italian! Venice is Italian!' shouted

little Mario, laughing, kissing his father, shuffling about, quite trembling with joy.

'Dear lad—dear lad!' said Gigli, pressing his child hard in his arms.

Cecilia looked on at this scene, smiling. She was feeling one moment of pure delight, knowing how the soldier's Italian heart was beating.

From that moment Captain Gigli had no peace. He went backwards and forwards through the house, giving orders to Grazietta, begging his wife to do this and that. He repeated, absent-mindedly, the same phrase three or four times. Then he raised the child in his arms, who began to shout out every time cheerfully, in his small voice:

'Venice is Italian! Venice is Italian!'

Captain Gigli went down to his office, and for a couple of hours there was a going backwards and forwards, a moving about of people getting orders, setting off running, and coming back at a run. Boats went and came several times from Nisida shore to Bagnoli, and from Bagnoli to the island. There was a great movement set on foot there. Everywhere, all over the island, the convicts deserted their work. In the forge the continuous hammering had stopped, the workshops had emptied, and everywhere groups of soldiers and convicts had formed. At one time, as Captain Gigli was going up again to his office-room, his child came out on the balcony and called out to him, waving his handkerchief:

'Venice is Italian!'

At four o'clock a roll of drums was heard all through the island. Out of barracks, houses, and ordnance workshops soldiers and officers had gone on to the large square in front of the Governor's house. They were all in full dress, as on the day of the *Statuto*, and soldiers were still coming up a few at a time—anyone who had lost time polishing his belt-buckle or putting buttons on his gaiters. A great, lively whispering was heard everywhere. Then, slowly, by squadrons, two by two, came up the convicts, led by the sergeants and warders. As they came on to the great square, they fell into order line above line evenly, and by degrees pushed forward a little. The soldiers formed a square in front of the Governor's house, the officers keeping in the middle. Behind the soldiers stretched out long rows of convicts, with red caps and green ones, colourless faces, and faces reddened by vitiated blood, that not even prison abstinence and life in the open air could correct.

The convicts spoke in whispers among themselves, but with animation, and the clinking of the chain rose in the air, slight but acute—that iron tinkling that is the characteristic noise in convict prisons.

Suddenly among the soldiers and convicts a very deep silence fell, and the square of soldiers, being pushed by impatient convicts wishing to get nearer

to see and hear better, drew together a little. Captain Gigli had appeared, dressed in uniform, which gave him a stronger, more robust, and sterner look. On his breast he bore three medals—one for civil bravery, the other for military; the third commemorated the campaign of 1859-60. He carried in one hand a telegram; in the other he led the child, his little son, dressed in white, his curly hair coming out beneath a white woollen cap. When the child had seen his father in uniform, he clutched his knees, screaming, because he wished to insist on going out with him; and his kind father, in that hour of satisfaction and tenderness, had not said no to him. Cecilia in haste and flurry had to dress him in his fine white frock, which gave a festive air to his gentle face under the white cap he was so proud of. The small boy was triumphantly hanging on to his father's hand, and he often looked at him, his eyes shining with love, proud of being led about, well dressed, as if he was a little man. His mother's hands trembled as she quickly dressed him, that solemn hour moved her so. Before she saw him off, holding his father's hand, she gave him a kiss on the forehead among the chestnut curls—a kiss that seemed a thought she put into the child's mind. Then while husband and son went downstairs to the square, she half shut the balcony venetians and hid behind them to see the spectacle herself unseen. She got a sort of shock, and almost drew back with a sensation of fear. The

vast square, the largest in Nisida, was full; the people overflowed it, even on to the slopes towards Bagnoli. In the middle the square of soldiers had pressed together still more, and formed a dull blue streak from their cloaks. All around was the large population of convicts, a great crowd, dressed in rough linen in all shades of brick-red, bright, dull, and faded; then all the officials on the island and prison contractors, those who live on and for the convict prison. In one corner, trying to keep away from that queer crowd, was a group of women, officers' and contractors' wives. While in the square there arose an indistinct rustle from the great crowd assembled there, one guessed and felt that all the rest of the island—city and country, houses and prisons, streets and squares—was empty, without a soul; one felt that the whole life of Nisida was concentrated in that square, and that all the rest was deserted land.

On Captain Gigli's appearance there was a universal hush; the square of soldiers widened out a little, and he went into it, still holding his child by the hand, and stood there, isolated, looking the whole crowd in the face, whilst officers, soldiers, and convicts, every one, respectable and disreputable, honest and criminal, turned their faces to him, almost blanched suddenly from waiting for a great moment. He made a sign; the standard-bearer came out from the ranks and went to stand on his left, unfolding and slightly

raising the flag of Italy. Captain Gigli, before speaking, turned and saluted it, putting his hand to his cap; the soldiers presented arms, and gradually all the convicts, in green and red caps, uncovered their heads, and stood thus bareheaded in front of the Italian flag fluttering in the breeze. Last of all, the child, slowly, looking in his father's eyes, took off his white cap, and stood bareheaded in the middle of the square. A great breath of emotion passed over all, and Captain Gigli's face got pale as he opened his lips to speak. All were looking at him—all.

Cecilia, from her balcony, seeing that her husband was about to speak, drew back a little. That great crowd of people, looking so intently at the Governor; that deep hedge of bareheaded convicts, which outnumbered and pressed closer and closer on the little square of soldiers; and the child in the middle, making a short white blot, all made her shiver. But more than anything it was the very great, the profound, silence.

'Officers and men,' Captain Gigli began, in a strong but rather subdued voice, 'to-day to Nisida island, as to every city in Italy, great news has come. Our King, our General, the head of our army, Victor Emanuel, to-day has made his entry into Venice. Venice is ours.'

To the tremor of his sonorous voice, to his emotion, a great shout replied, come from the mouths of soldiers and officers; there was a single

word, said distinctly and sharply, amidst other confused ones, a word that always came up again—'Venice'—'Venice.'

'We have a right to feel carried away, all of us,' Captain Gigli went on as the noise quieted down, 'for the great dream of Italian unity, for which thousands of men gave their whole hearts and minds, for which thousands of men put down their lives on the field of battle, for which we would all give it still—all of us, survivors and new men, old and young—because, you see, the great dream of unity goes on coming true, with a newer, stronger force. Oh, Venice—Venice! You were the country's sorrow. She mourned for you; you were not dead, but you were stolen; you were her cross—you, lovely, great, glorious, a miracle of art and an Italian fortress, were in the hands of the enemy. No one could mention you without weeping inwardly; all hearts flew to you; our women bore on their breasts the black pearl necklaces called *lacrime di Venezia*. To-day no one thinks of you without a quiver of affection, or says your name, Venice, without a feeling of deep happiness at being soldiers and Italians.'

A loud murmur of approval ran through officers and men. The standard-bearer waved the flag. The convicts looked on bareheaded and taciturn; they were thoughtful, as if waiting.

'I think,' Captain Gigli proceeded to say more slowly, 'that all of you, civil servants and officials,

who work in an obscure but worthy way for our country, you who do not scorn, since any service nobly carried out is noble, to be at the call of punitive justice—I think you, Italian patriots, come from all the provinces of Italy to this lonely spot, which is a place of punishment—I believe you all rejoice that Venice is ours. The telegram that announces the glad news adds that Victor Emanuel's march into Venice was a touching, magnificent sight; men of Venice shouted and wept with emotion; women held out their babes to the King of Italy, to Victor Emanuel, for him to bless them. What a grand thing, my friends, is this that has happened to-day! You, of course, cannot hear it without happy pride bringing tears to your eyes.'

All eyes around gave applause. Cecilia, behind the venetians, holding on to the bars not to fall, kept a handkerchief at her mouth to choke her sobs. There was a minute's pause and something like a surging among the crowd; soldiers and officers seemed to be crushed round Captain Gigli; the convicts pressed forward, dumbly, their eyes wide open, fixed on the Governor of the prison. He was gazing at them, or, rather, with a single glance round he looked at them all, as if wanting to guess the secrets of their souls.

'Oh, convicts!' he said in a sonorous voice, that had an echo in all ears and hearts—'convicts, I wished that you also, standing in front of the Italian

flag, should hear that Venice is ours. Everywhere, in cities and villages, hamlets and towns, peasant huts and ballad-singers' homes, wherever there is an Italian, rich or poor, there will be joy to-day; and everywhere, in far-off countries of Europe, in the distant lands of America and Australia, near the Pole and under the tropics—everywhere wherever there is an Italian heart, lost on the sea or wandering in the deserts, there will be joy when the news comes that Venice is ours. Oh, convicts! I did not want to exclude you from the common law of thankfulness. You are murderers and thieves; you have slain with steel and poison; you have committed arson, stolen, changed your men's hearts to the crooked instincts of brutes. The law of the land wisely, in the name of King and people, punishes you by its magistrates; punishes you, taking you out of the society of honest people, and putting you in irons—putting you out of the way of doing more harm; it punishes you, condemning you to hard labour, wisely seeking to make you penitent by chastisement. But where the law of the State ends the humane Christian law begins—an indulgent, merciful one. We are severe, not inhuman. Penitence purifies, so does repentance. Every day more that you spend in the prison, working and suffering, blots out a part of your sin. Many of you will leave this in three years, ten, or fifteen; you will go bearing with you, conquered by severe penitence and the habit of daily repentance, a

humane and pitiful heart. I believe you can all become good men; I believe also that those who will have to stay here all their lives may become so. Their sin has been great, but Divine mercy and human mercy are so great! I think the power of goodness is great enough to change you altogether; I believe in all the miracles of sentiment. Well, to-day I forget the past—I forget the law, the stern judgment. There should be no dissatisfied hearts here to-day. This is a great day. Forget the past and your black sin; forget that you are outside the law and society; forget your remorse and penitence. Consider to-day a national festival; your own country's conquest made by your native land. You are Italians, too. Forget everything but that you are Italians, every one of you.'

He stopped speaking, and the panting of a hundred breasts could be heard in the deep silence; some were sobbing, holding their heads down. Behind the venetians Cecilia was crying silently; big warm tears fell. With a vague gesture, Captain Gigli stopped speaking, looking now at the flag fixedly. But above the panting of troubled breasts, the uncontrollable sobs, a feeble, thin, small voice shouted:

'Hurrah for Venice!'

It was the child crying out at his father's side, waving his white cap. With his short, pale face and great shining eyes, he was rising on tiptoe, waving his arms, to let himself be seen and heard.

The child in white had given the word. Every one of them, soldiers and officers, clerks, and staff, all the convicts, sentenced for life or a term, young or old, assassins, thieves, incendiaries—all of them shouted with the small boy in white; they shouted with all their hearts, making a thundering noise that spread all over the island and seemed to shake it to its foundations—'Hurrah for Venice!'

As the first hours of darkness fell on Nisida the illuminations began. There were small lanterns made of transparent paper, with a tiny light inside, some were of three colours—white, red, and green—others were arranged in groups of three—one white, one red, another green—forming the national colours. There were some everywhere in lines, festoons, and clusters; along the balcony railings, hung at window projections, under door arches, and cornices of gateways; they were tied to acacia boughs along Nisida's streets, and even to iron gratings of the windows of the prison, where convicts were sent as a punishment; that was on the side of the island looking towards Bagnoli. On a high pole, made of small lamps in three colours, was the Star of Italy. It needed two or three hours' work to set the illuminations in their place; convicts and soldiers had fraternized to do it, going up ladders, standing on window-sills, climbing like squirrels, carrying around long boards covered with already lighted lanterns,

or pulling up from the second floor baskets full of illuminations. Nothing was heard but cheerful shouts giving directions, and long bursts of laughter when a convict or a soldier slipped or fell along a gateway arch ; it was a merry clamour that ended in a great burst of applause when the whole of one side of a house got illuminated. By eight in the evening the whole island sparkled like a jewel rising out of the sea ; it looked like an immense raft going placidly over the bay some holiday evening, all lighted up with the patriotic three colours, which threw clear, lively tints on the whitewash of the buildings and blackness of the country part—a lighted-up raft whence in the silence of the night came songs and music.

Indeed, the music began at eight o'clock; it was the band of the soldiers quartered at Nisida ; which happened to be short of five or six bandsmen, but they had been summoned from Naples, from the Pizzofalcone Barracks, on purpose to add to it for that evening. The band was posted on the great square ; a crowd of soldiers and convicts surrounded it ; all were at liberty that evening. Captain Gigli had had double rations served out to the soldiers and double allowance to the convicts, and he gave orders to officers and warders to look after the soldiers and convicts, but to let them amuse themselves. Whenever the band came on to the square, cheerful shouts greeted them : 'The Royal March !

Royal March!' 'The National Hymn! National Hymn!'

About twenty times the Royal March, so resounding in its first trumpet-calls, which sound like a summons to war, one that grows so in force when taken up again, came time about with Garibaldi's Hymn, that intoxicating, thrilling melody. Each time that the Royal March and Garibaldi's Hymn sounded on trumpets and drums a great yell came from these throats, and spread out resoundingly all over the island. Sometimes they shouted, 'Long live Victor Emanuel!' or, with a rumble like thunder, came the other shout, 'Hurrah for Garibaldi!' Then the boom began again, with hundreds of voices shouting, 'Hurrah for Italy!'

Only after an hour's playing were the trumpets allowed from fatigue to give over sounding the Royal March and Garibaldi's Hymn. They began to play popular pieces with variations founded on warlike or familiar songs, a style much in fashion then. Groups of soldiers and convicts accompanied the band as it played 'Bella Gigogin,' or 'Fenesta che Lucivi,' all beginning to sing together; some even managed to make their voices ring out splendidly, and when they got to the still famous 'Addio, Rosina, addio!' there was a concert in unison with voices in the upper and lower chords, some singing in their throats, without saying the words, as if playing accompaniments.

'Again! again!' they shouted when they wanted

to hear a piece a second time. Sometimes one of the bandsmen disappeared and went into the Governor's house, to the kitchen, where Grazietta gave him a glass of wine; then he went back to the square, to play with more energy. There was no wine given to the soldiers and convicts, but they were all excited by the lights, open air, music and singing, their own voices, and they seemed taken with a queer intoxication. Suddenly the band played a polka.

'Hold me up! hold me up!' the child said to Sciurillo.

Hanging on to Rocco Traetta's hand, the child had followed the whole progress of the illuminations, clapping his little hands for joy before the Star of Italy, in three colours. He wandered all over the island without getting tired, coming back frequently under his mother's balcony. She appeared, and he called up to her:

'Mamma dear! mamma dear!'

'Are you coming up?'

'No, no; I am going away. Sciurillo is carrying me.'

'Have no fear: I am taking care of him,' said the convict.

Sometimes, as he was carrying him about, Rocco Traetta asked him:

'Are you not cold, sir?'

'I am quite warm,' said the boy.

When they were singing in the square, he, too, raised his head and thin little voice: he repeated the chorus of 'Bella Gigogin' and 'L' armata se ne va'; but when he heard the sound of the polka, he began to say insistently:

'Sciurillo, Sciurillo, lift me up!'

Rocco Traetta, thinking that he was tired, lifted him up in his powerful arms, balancing him on one shoulder, high up, where Mario laughed and kicked his little feet against his breast.

'Make me dance, Sciurillo!'

Then, trying to make room with his elbows, still holding the boy up, Rocco Traetta began to wheel round slowly, slowly, to the sound of the polka. This was the signal. Couples of soldiers quickly started. They held each other by the waist, very tight; one of them clutched his friend's cloak at the back, holding it tight in his fist. They danced with knowing slowness, their legs rather wide apart, the cap thrown back off the forehead, the chin resting on the other man's shoulder. To begin with the convicts did not join in; they only looked on. However, as Rocco Traetta was still triumphantly carrying the child, who was laughing, straight on, some convict couples started, sliding queerly into the polka. Some young fellows had led a fast life in Naples, and knew how to dance quite well. They did not mind their chain, though it was heavy and jangled; no one heard the iron clatter. Other convicts formed

into rings and wheeled round, laughing, shouting, dancing, rising on tiptoe, as the band still quickened the time. Over the heads of them all, the child wheeled about, held high in Sciurillo's arms, and the white-clad boy gave light claps on the man's red hair, laughing in the clamour and bright light of that night.

V

In the half-darkness of the little room—for the shutters were nearly closed—the mother was telling a fairy tale, leaning over the small invalid's bed, speaking in a whisper only—a breath of a voice. The sick child listened, his eyes wide open, burning with fever, his scarlet, rather swollen, dry lips apart, his breath coming out of them in a wheezing way.

For five days diphtheria had clutched at his swollen throat, which was covered with malignant white pustules. Twice a day, sometimes even thrice, Dr. Caracciolo came to see the child; he gave him quinine and valerian to try to bring down the high degree of fever, and went on burning his throat with caustic to remove the white spots, which drew sorrowful cries from the small patient.

Cecilia stood by at the operation, white, dumb, and rigid. She bit her lips not to cry out. Only now and then she said, with great pity in her voice:

'My darling! my darling son!'

However, an hour after the operation, when the

smarting of the caustic had gone off a little, the child breathed more freely, the heat of the fever went down, he slumbered without that whistle in his breathing that agonized his mother's heart. He demanded something to drink and asked eagerly for food. They gave him strong soup with beaten eggs and a glass of marsala: for the new medical theory is that in acute blood-poisoning the strength of the body is to be kept up. It was a comfort to his mother to see him eating voraciously and drinking with eager thirst, and when he sank to sleep again she leant her head on the white pillow where her little one's was.

He would sleep for an hour quietly enough, his mother counting over the minutes of that refreshing sleep, feeling happy if it lasted long. She thought even a quarter of an hour, half an hour more was a sign of recovery. Suddenly the child opened his eyes again placidly, and felt for his mother's face with his little perspiring hands.

'Here I am, dear. How do you feel?'

'Quite well,' he invariably answered, smiling a little.

Then they said no more. Cecilia dried the child's moist forehead and hands with her fine handkerchief, patting his hands and kissing them gently. The little hand rested in his mother's for a long time, and deep silence was in the room.

'Tell me a story, mother,' said the child feebly.

Very softly, leaning over his bed, Cecilia told him a fairy tale. Always varying it, sometimes she invented even, with the heightened imagination of an uneasy mother. She made up queer medleys about old fairies and little queens which made the small invalid open his eyes wide; it amused him immensely. Sometimes, while the mother was telling her son a fairy tale, the father came in. He went in quietly, and came to lean over the bed at the top, trying to get accustomed to the darkness. Mario smiled to him silently in the shadow, getting his mother to finish the story. Gigli listened to that wonderful story too, not daring to interrupt; and accustomed now to the darkness, he gazed in his sick child's eyes. With the triumph of beauty and virtue, the punishment of ugliness and ill-conduct, the story ended, and the child nodded his head, satisfied and pleased.

'How is he now?' Captain Gigli asked his wife.

'I am well,' the little boy answered, before his mother could do so.

'He always says that, poor little fellow!' said Cecilia, petting his moist curls. 'He says it to make us keep up heart.'

'But is he not doing well?' asked his father anxiously, more uneasy in his mind than appeared.

'Just so-so,' said the mother, arranging the pillows.

They stood there silent and in low spirits. Gigli,

being in anguish himself, guessed at a part of her agony.

'You would like to carry him off, would you not?' he asked her, so as to get her out of her silence, for she seemed more crushed and knocked down than her sick child.

'Yes, I would.'

'The doctor says that it can't be done,' the husband remarked timidly.

'He can't be moved, I know,' she replied, flinging up her arms desperately.

'I am quite well here, mother,' said Mario.

'Poor little chap! poor chap!' said his father.

Cecilia went up close to her husband and said to him in a whisper:

'Promise me—promise——'

'I promise you anything, Cecilia dear.'

'Promise me that whenever he is better—whenever we can move him—you will let me go with him to Naples. Promise.'

'Yes, my dear, I will,' said Gigli, petting her as he did the child.

'Do you promise me?'

'Yes, I do.'

For he understood that in this serious illness of the child's her invincible horror of the prison had risen again in her heart.

In the evening the child indeed got worse, as all sick of sharp or lingering illnesses are apt to do.

His throat got contracted, his breathing laboured; he became heated, uneasy, and rolled about continually. Again on the red membrane of the throat the white blotches came rising slowly, forming again after the evening application of caustic. He hardly had a moment's peace; his mother shared his uneasiness. The voices of the watching sentinels, calling and answering each other, made the little body, burnt up by fever, give a start. She got nightmare again from these voices unfailingly breaking the silence of the night: they troubled the repose of tired folk and the light slumbers of the sick. It got to be that when she felt that 'All' erta, sentinella!' was coming, she even put her hands over the little one's ears, not to let him hear.

'It doesn't matter, really,' he said, turning round and round, getting no repose.

'Oh, this prison—this prison!' she said, half to herself.

'It does not matter,' the child insisted, fanning his burning little body with the sheets. His nights were so bad and so long.

Cecilia would not move a hair's-breadth from her son's bed. Although her husband begged and entreated her to let him watch himself, and Grazietta offered frequently to sit up, it was no use. Cecilia refused to move; her whole life was concentrated on that sick child's bedside. Pallid, dumb, in a dark gown tied at the waist by a nun's girdle, in slippers

so as to make no noise, she stayed, seated beside the bed, not answering her husband's or Grazietta's imploring requests.

'I am resting here,' she only answered, pointing out the boy's white pillow.

They had to leave her. They went off, shaking their heads—Captain Gigli troubled in his fatherly heart, the servant full of instinctive, motherly pity. But what nights they were! The fever got stronger; often the child, feeling suffocated, asked to be lifted. Cecilia wrapped him in blankets and sheets, and lifted him to sit straight up in her arms; he could breathe when he leant his head on his mother's shoulder. She carried him up and down, singing, poor thing! as desolate mothers do, vainly trying to soothe a sick child. Sometimes the little fellow, still lying in her arms, went off into a light sleep.

Although she saw that he had gone to sleep, she dared not lay him in the bed yet, and went on walking up and down with him slowly, the child leaning heavily on her shoulder. Then, fearing to let him sleep thus, sitting up in an uncomfortable attitude, in case it did him harm, she came, softly, close to the bed, and bent over to lay him down; but at the first movement the child made a little complaint in his light sleep.

'No, no!' she said, getting up, beginning to walk about again.

Sometimes she managed to lay him very carefully

in the bed, and he let his head down on the pillow so much at random, still with his eyes shut, that the mother shivered with terror almost, at a frightful idea. If he went on sleeping, she put down the lamp further, and went back to the bed to lean her head on the pillow, quite worn out. She did not sleep—no, it was only a troubled half-sleep which the sentinels' shouts interrupted, a snooze begun again by starts. Meanwhile the baby, being uneasy, wakened, but, seeing his mother sleeping, said nothing; he kept silent, his eyes wide open, gazing at the shadows on the ceiling. Only when the choking came on worse he began to whimper and cry, raising himself in bed as if to drink in the air he was losing. At once she wakened up in a great state, thinking that she had slept too long, almost asking her child's pardon.

'Darling—my darling!'

She could say nothing else to comfort him or to relieve him. How long these nights were! She longed for dawn with all her strength, so that the child's long torture and her own would be over, so that the lugubrious voices of the prison-watchers should cease.

The air got cold about five in the morning, some streaks of light began to show behind the shutters, and the child fell into a deep stupor. She kept looking at him, stock-still, as if magnetizing him, so that he should sleep quietly, sleep longer. From

this intensity of will-power her motherly eyelids got tired; she laid down her head, but still started up, trembling, two or three times, thinking she had heard her child cry. But, half asleep and half awake, she still saw him, slumbering deeply, and she herself fell into the profound, intense sleep people get into who have used up their moral and physical strength to an exceptional extent.

When, at eight o'clock, Dr. Caracciolo came, on his morning round, he found mother and son asleep close to each other, both pale.

'How did he pass the night?' asked the doctor, as he made his preparations for applying the caustic.

'He has had a bad night,' said the mother.

'He was sleeping just now.'

'Yes, but he was ill until five o'clock.'

The doctor put his head down a little, getting ready the brush.

'It is this prison!' said the despairing mother.

'No, no,' the doctor went on telling her; 'there is diphtheria at Naples, too.'

What did it matter to her? She gave the blame of all her anguish to the prison, so that from the first day of Mario's illness she gave Grazietta orders not to let any convict into the house, forbade it in such a burst of anger and grief that Grazietta was frightened; and to be able to give her husband, the convict, a little dinner, she told him not to come to

the kitchen grating as usual, but to wait for her at a certain place in the island, and she would bring him food in a covered dish.

'Neither your husband, nor Gennaro Campanile, nor Rocco Traetta—no one, no one!' Cecilia cried out, as if she feared the evil-eye.

Still, Rocco Traetta, from the day that the boy's illness began, wandered constantly round the house. He tried to get in the first day, but Grazietta told him, roughly and harshly:

'The signora wants no convicts in the house!'

He stood in the doorway, dazed.

'But how is he—how is the little one?' he asked, with a sob in his voice.

'Very ill. We are praying to God to make him well.'

'We must pray to God,' replied Rocco Traetta humbly.

Morning and evening he ran away from the work that he was set to do, and wandered round the child's house, waiting till someone came to make inquiries from. Punishment after punishment was showered on his head: he did not care; he forgot to eat and sleep just to be able to look at that balcony with the doors half shut in the daytime, to see a ray of light filtering through in the evening.

'How is he? how is he?' he said to Grazietta every time that he came across her, by lying in wait for her.

'Sometimes he is better, then he gets worse; one can't make it out. We must hope in the Madonna.'

'I trust in the Madonna.'

One day he accosted Dr. Caracciolo also. Rocco Traetta had never been ill, so that the prison doctor had had no opportunity of treating him. And, all of a sudden, Rocco stood in front of him, and said in a low voice:

'How is little Mario? how is he now?'

'What does it matter to you?' said the doctor, who was rather bluff, and in the habit of treating the convicts roughly.

'I was his servant, sir; I was little master's servant!'

Really, as he said so, he was so humble and in earnest that the doctor examined him narrowly, not being much accustomed to observe such feelings in convicts.

'He is so-and-so,' he then said in a grumbling way.

'But does he get better? You ought to make him well, sir.'

'That is what I hope to do,' said the doctor, passing on.

But Rocco Traetta's great agony was not getting into the house. Every time Signora Gigli showed behind the balcony windows, he appeared at a corner of the square, came forward, pulling off his red cap, and bowed two or three times, turning such

an imploring glance on her that any indifferent person would have been affected by it. But she did not see him, or did not choose to, for she turned her head another way and drew back at once, as if called for from within. He went away slowly, as if he were keeping guard round the house.

One day, the third or fourth, not able to bear it any longer, he had gone into the head office, where Captain Gigli was sitting writing. Captain Gigli was very pale, and he was writing in a nervous way. Rocco Traetta, cap in hand, waited till the Governor had finished writing; and he went on for some time, putting aside the letters he wrote without raising his eyes. At last Captain Gigli, noticing there was someone in the room, gave over writing.

'Is it you, Rocco Traetta? What do you want?'

'I would like to know, sir,' said the convict in a low voice—'I want to know about . . . the little one.'

'Poor little fellow!' said the father, much touched; 'he has a cruel illness; he suffers a great deal.'

'Holy Virgin! Holy Virgin!' Rocco Traetta exclaimed sadly.

'Poor little chap! he is so patient,' said Gigli in a low tone, half to himself; 'his mother is always beside him.'

'But he will soon be well? When will he recover?'

'It will need some days yet—still some days.'

The convict stood silent, confused; it was evident that he wanted to say something, and that he dared not. Then, as he had come for the purpose, he said:

'. . . And can he not see anyone?'

Captain Gigli raised his eyes to that guilty face, and saw a great longing and anxiety impressed in it.

'For the present, no,' he replied, after thinking a little. 'He is nervous, poor little fellow! and people in the room bother him.'

'At one time, when he was with me, I could amuse him.'

'That is true; but you must wait to see him. The doctor has given these orders also.'

'Well, how long must I wait—to-morrow or the day after?'

'Longer than that—longer; he needs rest,' said Gigli vaguely, embarrassed by Rocco Traetta's obstinacy.

Again there was silence. Rocco Traetta twirled his red cap in his fingers, not making up his mind to go away, still having something to say. Captain Gigli, feeling embarrassed, not knowing how to answer such pressing questions, wished to send him off. He put his head down and began writing again.

'Your Excellency, you are so good as to bear with me; will you do me a kindness?'

'Say what it is,' said Gigli, rather bothered.

'Greet him from me—the little chap. Tell him

that Sciurillo sends him many greetings. Please, sir, don't forget it.'

'Very well,' said the Governor; 'I will be sure to tell him.'

The convict murmured, 'Many thanks to you, sir,' and went out slowly, followed by a look from Captain Gigli.

Nothing could astonish him — neither extreme ferocity nor extreme humility, neither good nor evil —for he had lived in that convict prison for six or seven years; but often human nature showed itself in such a queer way it gave him a start. Rocco Traetta had killed his father at one blow over a question of money; he was a parricide of the most frightful kind, from the motive, time, and the whole circumstances. Still, that man, who for ten minutes in his life had been more murderous than a wild beast, was shivering with grief, speaking of a sick child. Captain Gigli knew—for he knew everything that took place on the island—that Rocco Traetta wandered round his house trying to get in; but he knew, too, that his wife's tender soul became implacable when confronted by these hateful objects. She wished no convicts in the house. She told Grazietta so, even before Captain Gigli. And none came in—not one. When Nisida, the prison, and the convicts were mentioned to her by chance, as naturally happened, she half shut her eyes, to hide a flash of rage, to try not to say what her heart told

her, and she bent over her child's bed to kiss his thin, hot cheeks and soft hair, saying, with infinite compassion in her voice: 'My darling! my darling!'

So, not even Captain Gigli, frightened, shaken, and inwardly despairing over the boy's illness and his wife's dumb desperation—not even he dared remind her that there was a soul in torment, wandering round the house. Silently, trying not to let himself be seen, not let himself be heard, like a thorough evildoer, Rocco Traetta passed his day in the little lanes round the square, walking about if he saw anyone appearing, sitting on the ground when he was alone; he wandered about distractedly, rushing away from the court the convicts fed in, taking his lump of bread and the relish with him. He rebelled silently against whatever scolding or punishment the warders gave him. He did not shout out or quarrel, but he always ran off as soon as he could. He thought out all sorts of tricks, and on his return bore threats and punishments dumbly, so long as they let him stay outside. On two nights he got away from the dormitory even, where the oversight was so strict, and spent the night under the feebly-lighted balcony. He came in again at dawn, not having slept at all, and was met by the very warder sent to search for him in great alarm.

A report was made to Captain Gigli. It almost

looked as if Rocco Traetta was trying to escape, said the warder in his report. Captain Gigli replied that he did not believe that it was an attempt at escape; Rocco Traetta was to be treated rather indulgently. Gigli's heart was doubly moved; he felt pity for the suffering child and also a little for that wretched, tortured man who had no peace. But in Cecilia's heart—in her deep motherly heart—nothing existed but one single sympathy, and it was for her child. She saw and heard nothing of what went on around except the pain of that bad throat, red with inflammation, white with blisters, that always came back again inexorably.

She had chased everyone out of that room, and she only thought of the world she lived in, to hate it and believe it to be the cause of the child's illness. She thought of it in the long night hours, when the sentinels' voices prevented her son from sleeping; they reminded her that she lived in a penal settlement. But, except for that, her affection, her kindness, all a mother's strongest feelings were summed up in her son alone. It mattered not to her who might go round the house uneasy about the child's state, or ask affectionately for him, she did not care who might be in an agony to see him. She, the mother, mystically endowed, stood between his world and the child; her magnetic force, her impetuous love, her burning will would alone be able to save him. Her soul was sunk in continual, despairing prayer;

she was altogether an invocation to God. Nothing else—God, and no one else.

* * * * *

The child had had changes of getting better and worse for eight days. Sometimes the swelling in the throat got milder, its redness faded, the white blisters taken away by the touch of caustic did not form again, and the high fever that burnt up the poor boy went down; he seemed on the way to be cured. His mother's heart opened at once to a great hope. Only Dr. Caracciolo's face kept always the same, not disturbed, but grave. The system of cure went on in all its harshness: the burning with caustic two or three times a day, with strong doses of quinine and a full diet. For relapses came suddenly. That appearance in the throat of large corroding, suffocating pustules by some unexpected fatality began again; the fever flamed up, stronger, more scorching; the child raved and raved, putting his little hands to his throat, his despairing eyes going round in his worn face. The mother was stunned and confused by the unexpected relapse; she lost all her treasury of hopes in a minute; she was seized all at once by black terror. She stammered, calling him by name, repeatedly asking him how he felt; she shivered, holding him in her arms, to cradle and soothe him; her choked voice could no longer sing the usual little song.

So from day to day, from night to night, her heart

leapt from joy to grief, from hope to desperation. Her husband, often consumed in the night by a mortal uneasiness, did not sleep, but walked up and down in his widowed room. Sometimes he crossed the two rooms on tiptoe, gently opened the door of the little room, and looked in. He was very happy if he could find his wife and son in one of their few moments of repose, and went away silently, quietly, rather comforted, thinking that that rest was a refreshment for the two martyrs. But often, in the small room, the mother's weary shadow was going up and down, holding her complaining child in her arms bound up in blankets, letting a tired, emaciated face be seen.

'Is he worse?' he asked in a whisper.

'Much the same,' she replied in the same tone, going on with her walk.

'My poor son!' the father always said in a low voice.

After gazing on that sad picture a minute he went away. He could not rest either, thinking of that desolate, motherly shadow going up and down the room. The twelfth day, especially, the child got rather worse; not even the touching with caustic in the evening relieved him, though Dr. Caracciolo did it with scrutinizing attention and the greatest care. He was always asking for something to drink, then he could hardly swallow it, and he lamented and wept—yes, cried with pain, which tore Cecilia's heart. She gave him little bits of ice, which re-

freshed him for a moment, but the heat and burning began again; that feeble, tossing body could not be kept down. The doctor had gone away, thoughtful as usual, but not alarmed.

In the evening, as Cecilia was sitting beside the bed and Captain Gigli was leaning against the top of it, the boy began to quiet down a little.

'How do you feel?' his father asked.

'I feel better,' said the child in his small voice.

After a silence, he opened his eyes, and, looking at his father and mother, he asked them:

'Do you love me very much?' Both of them got a start at this question, and looked each other in the face dumbly. 'Do you love me very much? You ought to love me a great deal, papa and mamma,' said he, shutting his eyes again.

'My darling, my darling!' said his mother, hardly keeping back her tears.

'I love you so much—so much,' muttered his father, choking also.

But the beginning of the night was better; the child was pallid and worn out, but he did not rave or feel choked as in the daytime. Indeed, he often went to sleep quietly, with his head thrown back on the pillow and arms stretched along his body. He wakened up again, but not uneasily; he looked round, without saying anything.

'He is not so ill, I think,' said Captain Gigli to his wife as it got late.

'He seems to be resting,' she whispered; 'go and sleep.'

'I will come back,' he said.

In fact, at about two o'clock he came back very softly. The boy's sleep had got heavier, and his breath whistled in his throat; sometimes he had a guttural sort of wheezing. But, except for that, he was resting.

'He is sleeping,' whispered Gigli, below his breath.

'He is sleeping,' the mother repeated.

Again he went away. Cecilia bent her head in sleep, when a breath wakened her. It was the child's voice.

'Mother, where is the lamp?'

'Is it too high? Should I put it down?' she asked, leaning over his bed.

'No; it is that I don't see it.'

She did not quite understand. She made out that the light was too low, and went to move the lamp so that the light went full in his eyes.

'Is that right now?'

He smiled slightly, nodded yes, and shut his eyes as if to go to sleep.

About four o'clock the little fellow opened his eyes again and looked round frightened. He almost thought that he had been left alone, but with a struggle he lifted his head from the pillow and saw that his mother was still there, resting. He gazed at her with his lovely big eyes, enlarged by

fever, then his head fell on the pillow again, exhausted by the effort. The lamp fully lighted up the little worn face that the breath was coming from with a struggle. He did not call out or say a word; only he lifted a tiny hand and lightly put it on his mother's cheek. She felt the touch, perhaps, and without opening her eyes said:

'My darling!'

Then he made a motion with his head at his mother's voice, and shut his eyes. The tiny hand stayed on his mother's cheek as a caress, and to rest it.

* * * * *

He was gone!

He was on high

VI

THERE was a light knock at the door. Captain Gigli, who was seated by the little table, alone, his face between his hands, raised his tearful eyes, and said:

'Come in.'

Grazietta came in, and silently handed her master a bit of white paper. He opened it, and read this writing, in pencil, in a trembling hand: 'Remember your promise.'

It was his wife's writing; that was all that was in the note. What he was to remember did not come back at once to Captain Gigli's confused mind. He looked at Grazietta dreamily, as if wishing to question her. She threw up her arms to show she did not know.

'Remember your promise.' So Cecilia had written from the dead child's bedside. What could the despairing mother want? What could she be asking for? Suddenly, amid a medley of dark thoughts, the recollection darted into the father's mind. He was not able to bear it, and said to Grazietta:

'Tell your mistress that I am coming—I am coming to her.'

In fact, in a few minutes he went through the

little parlour; its doors were wide open, but there was no life in it. He got to the door of the small room the child was in; a slight scent of herbs and flowers, a feeble light of wax candles, came out. And the soldier of the War of Independence, who had seen death on fields of battle and in hospitals without being moved, dared not go into the boy's room. He waited a minute, then called out:

'Cecilia!'

Slowly, in her black dress, her hands hanging listlessly down, the mother came out. A livid pallor covered her cheeks, and she had the staring eyes of one vainly trying to fix her thoughts. She stood motionless in the doorway, turning round sometimes, as if she was called for.

'Poor soul——' he began, putting his hand on her head. But he could bear no more, and big tears rolled down his brown cheeks.

'Don't cry—don't cry!' she said in a monotonous voice, that had no expression left in it. 'I am not weeping. Will you keep your promise?'

'Now? Would you wish it now?'

'Yes, I do,' she said obstinately.

He looked at her, not daring to question her.

'I wish to take away the child,' she said harshly.

'Take him away? Thus?'

'Yes, even now,' she said sternly. 'He was born in a prison; he died in it. I wish to take him to Naples, where there are no convicts.'

'To Naples?'

'To the Naples cemetery, where there are no convicts, to lie among the good, honest dead.'

He looked at her, and took her by the hand.

'There will be difficulties,' he said.

'If I had to carry him in my arms, I would take my baby away!' she said obstinately, harshly.

'You are right,' he said, conquered, convinced.

'Everything must come from Naples, Luigi—everything, you understand?' she said imploringly. 'For love of him, nothing from here, you know—nothing!'

'There will be nothing got here, dear—nothing.'

She turned round to watch over the dead child, with the same wandering eyes which after the strain was over could not fix on anything. Employment came to distract the father's deep grief; there were all the tremendous difficulties of taking anything from Nisida to Naples, of getting permission and authorization to do so. The whole day long there were telegrams sent backwards and forwards between Pozzuoli, Naples, and Nisida, messengers left and others arrived—a feverish activity, by which the father's grief found an outlet, a relief. Those going and coming had the miserable look of people doing a sad bit of work unwillingly, out of affection or duty; they only said what was required, speaking in a whisper, as if they feared to disturb someone's rest. The father listened in

rather an absent-minded, confused way; he thanked them with a look. If a new difficulty arose, he at once set himself again to give orders, write, and telegraph.

But all this was in his office. In the house with the wide-open doors there was a profound hush, and only Grazietta was going about on tiptoe, often drying her eyes with her blue apron. Something was being got ready hurriedly. From the square could be seen the ghastly waxlights in the child's room. In the office there was a string of people, men and women, asking the Governor if it was possible to see the child. This was the Southern custom. When there is a death, all doors are opened and the people come in. Then, if it is a dead child, everyone comes also for the purpose of securing its protection, for they piously believe the child can take all their prayers to God. But Gigli replied to them all:

'Later on, later on.'

For twice, when he called Cecilia to tell her this, she replied 'No' obstinately.

'I will not have it,' she said dully.

'Oh, Cecilia, allow them to pray for him.'

'The child is on high; he does not need their prayers.'

The second time, rather moved by her husband's entreaties, she said:

'Not now, not now; afterwards.'

They all went away sure of coming back later.

Only Rocco Traetta stayed on in a corner of the office, seated on a wooden form in the passage, holding his cap in his hand with his head down. In the morning he had called to Grazietta from the kitchen grating to get news of the little chap, and she, bursting into tears with her head hid in her apron, said to him:

'The little one has gone to Paradise.'

Traetta stood there stupefied.

'The little one! What! the little one?' he said.

From that moment he had gone into the office lobby and sat huddled up in a corner not asking any questions. Twice or thrice in passing Captain Gigli saw him, but he did not stop, for he felt embarrassed by Traetta's presence. Only, the third or fourth time, Traetta got up and said to him:

'Your Excellency, do me the kindness of letting me see the little one.'

'Later on, later on,' said Gigli hastily.

'Tell the lady; tell her that I never went in when he was ill, because she did not wish it. Say to her she ought to do me this kindness now.'

'I will tell her that.'

He went away, but after an hour he was again in the office lobby, waiting with the invincible patience of a broken heart. At last, towards evening, when Captain Gigli, worn out, was going from the office on his way home, he said to him:

'Come to-morrow morning before we start.'

The convict looked at him, astonished, then he bowed his head.

'Thank you, sir.'

When he went upstairs Gigli had his wife called into the passage. She was still the same, always with that sudden turning back, as if someone were calling her.

'Everything is done,' said Captain Gigli, with a struggle.

'At what time is it to be?'

'To-morrow, at mid-day.'

Only when the hour was fixed on, only when that definite, last, closing word was said by her husband in a low voice, only then that woman with the heart turned to stone reeled; a frightful sob seemed to rend her breast, and she fell into her husband's arms, crying out and weeping, seized by a convulsion of sorrow, broken down, like a tree that quivers from its roots, in such a passion of grief that the man, a soldier, was afraid, and held her in his arms, silent, frightened, dumfounded, thinking that perhaps she would die that very moment, and he could do nothing to save her.

It was on a mild November morning that the filing past of those come to greet the dead child began from the wide-open doors of the Governor's house. From Naples had come the thick candles of wax which were burning—a symbol of the Christian soul burnt up by faith; thence came the bunches of

fresh flowers with which his bed and room, the house and stairs even, were scattered; from there came the white garment and the shoes that the little one was to take his last journey in; from Naples, finally, came his last bed, a coffin lined with silk.

The first to go into the little room was Rocco Traetta; he went in very softly, almost sliding over the floor. The mother dressed in black, her hair rather loose on her neck, was seated at a little distance from the bed, holding her knees with her hands. She looked at the convict as if she did not see him; her eyes had no expression in them. Rocco Traetta knelt down beside the bed, leaning his head against the edge, and stayed there a long time, not weeping or saying a word. He cautiously took hold of one of the little child's waxen hands, kissed it, and put something in it. The mother kept motionless; at one point she looked at the convict icily, as if she would chase him away. He got up and left the room; but he stayed in the corridor, standing in the shadow, seeing a lot of people pass in front of him—women, children, soldiers, officers—all those who, from a feeling of compassion, a melancholy sort of curiosity about death, went into the sweet-smelling room where the little dead one lay.

No one asked what the paper was, closed and sealed like a letter, that the child held in its fingers. When a young child dies in the Southern provinces, those who go to see it, or the relations themselves,

put in its hands, in the girdle or folds of the dress, some tiny letter; it is almost always a prayer to the Lord or the Virgin, asking a favour, which the child carries with it to Paradise. So Rocco Traetta had put in the *peccerillo's* fingers a letter directed to the Virgin, Our Lady of Sorrows, asking her *to do him the favour*. He saw the people pass; they went in, knelt down, and prayed, without feeling the courage to say anything to that dark figure of a mother turned to stone. Nor did she tremble when Captain Gigli called her outside, and, trembling all over, said to her:

'We ought to go now.'

'Very well,' she said resolutely, going towards her room, like a machine, to get a cloak and bonnet.

They were to go with the dead child to Naples: and of course it was not such an agonizing wrench as if they had had to see him carried off and stay themselves in the house. They were going out; they were going together; this doleful journey would assuage the agony. The husband tried to detain his wife in the room, not to let her hear the noise of the coffin being nailed down. It was soldiers who did the work, delicately, making as little noise as possible. She saw and heard nothing. Rocco Traetta and Grazietta were present. The servant shed tears, silently, seeing the little corpse settled in its coffin as in a bed, its tiny head resting on the silk pillow. The convict was dumb; he did not shed tears, but

his eyes were burning, as if a rush of bloody tears had gone over them. On the bier and over it were flowers, and all around. Other soldiers carried more wreaths behind. The coffin was carried down silently, and in the square, around the bier, stood those who wished to follow it, at least as far as the iron gate. There were officers, their wives, and the clerks. The bier stood in the midst of them, borne by soldiers, and was covered with flowers. It was a large, sweet-smelling heap of flowers.

The mother and father went down a little later. She had a black veil over her head, but the full light and the little crowd alarmed her. She searched for her child's face, and only saw the coffin.

'Luigi, Luigi!' she said, as if she was praying. 'He is inside there, is he not?'

'Yes, he is.'

'But I will see him again. At Naples you will show him to me?'

'Yes, dear—at Naples.'

On foot, slowly, the procession moved on. Immediately after the coffin came the father and mother, then the officials. She was walking, leaning on her husband's arm, her eyes fixed on the bier, swinging about as it went down the slope. Then Rocco Traetta came behind—the last one. The landscape had got a little bare, but a mild sun lit it up, as it was mid-day. The party seemed to be

going away, leaving the island for ever, with no thought of ever returning to it. At the great iron gates there was the leave-taking. Everyone pressed Captain Gigli's hand, saying some comforting word to him. The iron gate opened wide and shut again. From there two soldiers carried the bier. The dead child's father and mother, two officers and two civilians, went on also down to the shore with it, and the rest of the little crowd, including Rocco Traetta, went up into the island again. But he, though no one noticed it, stood still on the woody slope, looking at the procession, appearing and disappearing among the bushes, still going down. He was gazing at the vivid colours of the flowers that covered and fell down from the little coffin, gazing at the *little chap* who was going off for ever.

Suddenly, at an angle of the road going down to the little beach, the procession was hidden from him, and he stood some time without seeing it. But he waited patiently. Perhaps there, in the island, they were searching everywhere for him, but he was forgetful of everything. He narrowed his eyes intently to see if the burial-party would show again. As a fact, it did, on the shore. The large boat waiting for it had no signs of mourning; indeed, it had flowers at the bottom and thrown on to the seats. The two sailors saluted by raising their oars. In a minute the boat was loaded with wreaths, and in

the middle, among the loose flowers and wreaths, the coffin was placed. Nothing but flowers could be seen. At the prow sat the father and mother, pallid figures in black; alongside of them was the funeral party, forming a group. So the boat went, laden with flowers, through the blue sea slowly, as if a happy party were being borne along. Thus Rocco Traetta saw it go, bright and sweet-smelling, sliding over the quiet waves with an indistinct movement.

On the deserted Bagnoli shore that November morning only the outline of two carriages could be seen. No one stopped to look at the boat laden with flowers that came forward slowly, perhaps in obedience to a word from the mother. So the dead child went away for ever, among flowers, over the blue sea—went away from the prison, the convicts, off to freedom.

So Rocco Traetta saw him go off. He had not been able to see him or greet him while yet he lived, and now he greeted him dead. He spoke in a whisper, as if speaking to him, as if the boy could still hear him, calling him the *peccerillo*, the bonny boy, and asking his help to get the favour he wished from the Virgin, reminding him of the letter he had put in his hands, which had been enclosed in the coffin. The boy was far off. He was getting out of the boat now; they were putting him in the carriage,

still among flowers; the father and mother got in with him; the others went in the second carriage. The child was very far off; the carriages drove away quickly; they disappeared on the Fuorigrotta road. All was ended. The child was dead; he had disappeared.

VII

THERE was no moon that night. The thin veil of autumn mist that had covered the sky in the daytime had become in the evening a thick bank of clouds. A black sky rested on the blackness of the sea, on the profound darkness of Nisida; but it did not look like a hurricane or as if rain was coming; there was great quietness in the air, rather, and all around, so that the sentinels standing up under the arch of their sentry-boxes questioned the shadows absent-mindedly. Some sentinel had lighted a small lantern at the bottom of the sentry-box—for all the lamps on the island had gone out—but its feeble light was covered by the soldier's body; he stood right in front of his wood and iron hut. There was profound shadow and quietness; only, as always, every quarter of an hour the summoning voice began at one end of the island, producing another, slowly, regularly, up to the further end, and turning back, round and round, with the answer:

'Be on the alert, sentinel!' ('All' erta, sentinella!')

'On the alert I am!' ('All' erta sto!')

The questioning voice was liveliest—it sounded like an alarm—while the answering voice was quiet,

peaceful, almost serene, in its confidence of watching. The quiet was so profound that night. Only, about two o'clock—in the depth of the night, that is to say—the sentinel guarding the sharpest angle of the island towards Pozzuoli gave a start. He had heard no noise, but a sort of electric shock told him that the solitude around was broken by a man or an animal. Sometimes, in a dark room, in a court-yard, a street, or countryside, where one is perfectly sure of being alone, one gets suddenly an absolute certainty that there is someone about. You don't see or hear anything, but you feel that an empty space has been filled up by a body. It was so with the sentinel. He peered into the darkness, but he could make out nothing. Thinking that it was the nearest-posted sentinel come to ask him for a match to light his pipe, he said, rather in a whisper:

'Who goes there?'

He got no answer; he shook his head, thinking that he had been mistaken. But he came from Calabria; he was accustomed to walk at night on dangerous roads, looking out not to be surprised; and he went on watching, taking a few steps cautiously round the sentry-box. Again there was profound quiet. But half an hour had not gone by when, for the second time, he had exactly the same idea of someone moving about thirty paces off, a little higher up, in a hedge that covered steps down from the island. Instead of answering the challenging

sentence that was sounding then—'Be on the alert, sentinel!'—he levelled his gun and fired. Immediately two long, agonizing cries were heard, and all around, all over the island, wherever there was a sentinel, the furious, stormy, shrieking words sounded:

'To arms! To arms! To arms!'

Three or four gun-shots rang out together, bringing out others round the island; there was a circle of lowered guns firing towards the sea blindly, because the word of command was to fire down towards where the fugitives were going—the unknown fugitives. There was a wreath of fire and smoke round the island in the night, and at once, amidst the tumult of the awakened prison, of soldiers led by an officer who were running to the search, the sharp clatter of guns being reloaded was heard. Tumultuously, the warders in the dormitories had the convicts' names called over to see who was missing, while an orderly ran swiftly to the bottom of the island to start off two boats to make a search. Everywhere the lamps were lighted again, the whole of Nisida was on foot.

Half dressed, pale, frightened at his responsibility, the Under-Governor who took Captain Gigli's place in his absence, after having gone through the guard-house, went to attend the convicts' roll-call in the dormitories. They, already dressed, alarmed, did not hear the roll-call or answer in time, and there was a yelling and cursing by the warders, a

shouting by convicts, punishments raining down. At every dormitory that was found to be full the ghastly-looking Under-Governor gave a sigh of relief. Who could tell? Perhaps not one was missing —perhaps it was a false alarm of the sentinel's towards Pozzuoli. But outside every now and then an isolated gun-shot sounded, people were searching about, calling each other, and there was a sharp clatter of guns being reloaded. The roll-call in the prison went on. Sometimes a convict answered to his name in a melancholy way:

'I am here—I am here. Lucky chap that has escaped!'

Yes, they all envied the unknown men who had escaped. One saw it in their faces, by their whispered conversations and malicious smiles. The warders were raging. It was in the last dormitory, where there were sixty convicts, that fifty-eight only were found. The warder, driven desperate, went over the roll-call three times, thinking that he had made a mistake! but there were fifty-eight, still fifty-eight—two were wanting. Turning to the Under-Governor, who had got clay-colour, he said:

'Two have escaped.'

'Who are they?'

'Giacomo Calamà, called Ingannalamorte.'

'Who is the other?'

'Rocco Traetta, called Sciurillo.'

'Are they young fellows?'

'Yes, they are.'

The Under-Governor bit his lip to keep back an oath; then he went away hurriedly to organize the search better.

All over the island the two names Ingannalamorte and Sciurillo were spreading from mouth to mouth, repeated and commented on by everyone. There were lights running about among the bushes, among the cliffs; people at the base of the island were coming and going; everywhere officers' sabres were clinking. Some lights were lit even on the Bagnoli shore opposite. It took an hour before the boats could be set in motion. Their huge lanterns left a sort of bloody track of light on the sea; they went round slowly, exploring every grotto, going into every little bay in the island. In the boats the barrels of the soldiers' guns sparkled, reflecting the red lantern light. Every now and then, from some hallucination of a watching sentinel, a gun-shot was heard, and the Under-Governor, who was going backwards and forwards much agitated, stood still, thinking it was the signal that the fugitives had been retaken. The convicts had all been sent back to bed, but none of them were sleeping; they were chattering, and it was impossible to keep them silent; some of them made vows out loud for the deserters not to be taken. But the tumult and searching did not cease till morning, when the report was made to the Under-Governor about the escape. Two chains

had been found, with their rings neatly filed, in the grass near the bushes where the Calabrian sentinel had *felt* the fugitives' presence. Giacomo Calamà, called Ingannalamorte, could not be found, alive or dead, by sea or land, neither at Bagnoli, Pozzuoli, nor in the abyss—nowhere. Declared *escaped*. Rocco Traetta, called Sciurillo, had been found lying on the rocks, his skull fractured—dead.

THE END

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THE LAND OF COCKAYNE

By MATILDE SERAO

Some Press Opinions

The Pall Mall Gazette.—It is long since we have read—and, indeed, re-read—any book of modern fiction with so absorbing an interest as "The Land of Cockayne," the latest book by Matilde Serao (Heinemann), and surely as fine a piece of work as the genius of this writer has yet accomplished. It is splendid! Powers of the highest order, an intensity of feeling almost painful in its acuteness, a breathless vigour that carries the reader off his feet and away, like some turbulent mountain stream—these are but some of the qualities manifest in this astounding epic of superstition, sorrow, and shame. We can think of no other writer who has given us so startling and, at the same time, so true an insight into Neapolitan life and thought, while throughout the whole, like the ever-recurring notes of a leit-motif, comes the influence, in one shape or another, of the inborn gambling craze. Peculiarly pathetic, though slight in its relation to the whole story, a mere feature in the grand general scheme, is the love-tale of the rough peasant-born Dr. Amati and Donna Bianca Maria—poor hypersensitive, wasted flower of humanity. The ruin that comes on the good bourgeoise Fragalàs; the love-lorn factory girl, who beggars herself in order to play, play, play, so that her handsome, good-for-nothing lover may swagger as a "gentleman," and possibly marry her. An *ambo!* oh, for an *ambo!* It is the recurring cry from first to last—from the old Marquis, the father of Bianca Maria, to the hunchbacked shoeblack; all meet on a common ground, are bound by a common wish. The character-drawing is subtle and convincing; every touch tells. Take, for instance, the sketch of the sisters Donna Caterina and Donna Concetta, the one who owns the "small game" and the other who lends the money to stake with to the infatuated crowd, thus playing into each other's hands, while they draw in and suck under their dupes like a veritable human Scylla and Charybdis. Yet these sisters are (after their fashion) both just and pious women; they warn their clients not to gamble, and give of their substance to the saints and to the poor. Such books as "The Land of Cockayne" are epoch-making, voices that cry aloud in the wilderness of modern "literature," and will be heard while others only cackle.'

The Spectator.—'An elaborate and ruthless study of the gambling instincts as developed by State lotteries in modern Italy. The tragic consequences of indulgence in the gambling mania are traced out with a wealth of convincing detail. "The Land of Cockayne" is a great novel, with a most laudable purpose, the lessons of which, *mutatis mutandis*, should not be thrown away on English readers. One can only regret that the theme has never been adequately treated by an English writer of equal genius to that of Madame Serao.'

Some Press Opinions—*continued*

The Bookman.—'Zola has never written a more terrible account of a social evil than Madame Serao's tales of Neapolitan lotteries. Save that we seem to see concentrated in her pages all the evil in its awful variety of forms, there is no exaggeration. Every several tale is true, and every one tells of the same poisoning of the life of the people by the two contending forces, locked there in a deadly alliance of poverty and the lust of gambling.'

The Speaker.—'Matilde Serao has great gifts, perhaps the greatest: she is *simpatica*. To translate this quality into an English epithet baffles my vocabulary, but it amounts to this: that we like Matilde Serao in her writings. Also, she is well informed in a certain sphere, and within that sphere her books move. Out of the fulness of the memory, the imagination, the observation, the heart, does the true modern novelist's mouth speak. Who loves Naples will find what he loves in Naples happily seized, and his curiosity in the Siren City nourished and yet continued.'

The Academy.—'Matilde Serao has the direct, impersonal manner that belongs only to the efficient. In her books are no asides, no pauses, no extraneous interpolations. The story moves in the uninterrupted fashion of life. Having set out to deal with such and such a subject, Matilde Serao does that, and nothing else, the unwavering concentration of her methods rendering the average English novel, with its slipshod construction and frequent digressions, like so many 'prentice efforts by comparison.'

The Daily Chronicle.—'This is an absorbing and, on the whole, a very persuasive book. Cockayne is Naples in these pages—Naples given over to the lottery, crazed, debauched and beggared by it. If the colouring is high, the outline is unmistakably true. Matilde Serao's fascinating book has, however, another side, and those who know anything at all of the city which it describes will delight in the countless incidental sketches of social life—high, middle, and low.'

The Pilot.—'It is not the Naples of the *forestieri*, a city builded of sun-warm colours between blue of sea and sky, which the well-known Italian novelist gives us in "The Land of Cockayne." Beneath the surface fairness of that Southern world of vineyards, olive-groves, and palms, Matilde Serao reveals the volcanic forces of smouldering fumes and devastating flame. The book is a tragic presentment of the popular passion for the lottery and its disintegrating effect upon individual and civic life. The studies are mercilessly realistic, both of social types and their suggestive setting. "The Land of Cockayne," in its knowledge of the people, their passions and their weaknesses, and the insidious influence of the lottery upon them, rises to the dignity of a social document. The translation is admirable, giving the curious hardness of the author's style, the sharp etching of outlines, unsoftened by intervening atmosphere.'

The Scotsman.—'It bears every trace of being drawn from the life, of being a mercilessly faithful transcript of certain aspects and phases of Neapolitan society. It has many marks of genius, and it has had the good fortune to be well translated.'

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